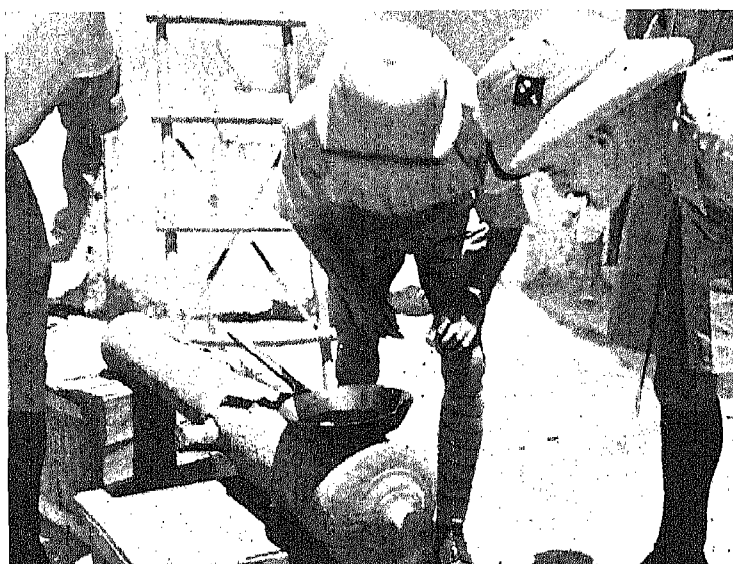
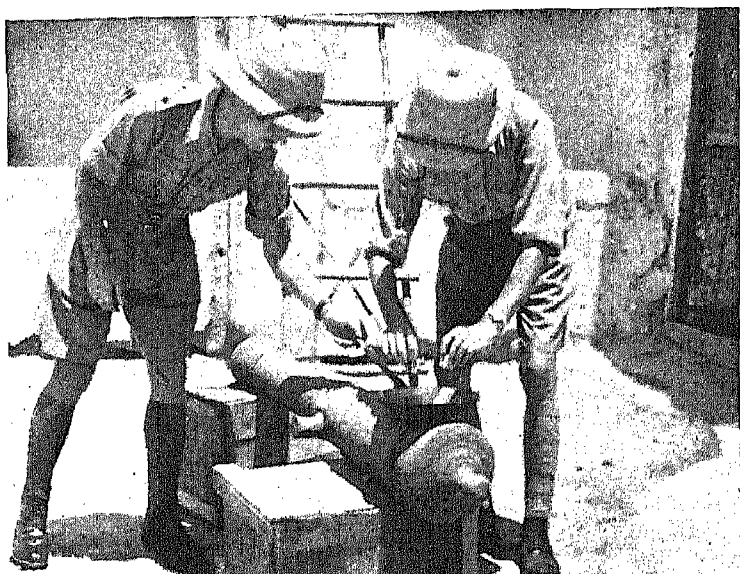




## SEVEN CANTONMENTS



FRYING AN EGG BY THE HEAT FROM THE SUN

*(Top)* There she goes.

*(Bottom)* Is it really cooking?



# SEVEN CANTONMENTS

*By*

MAJOR S. E. G. PONDER

LINE DRAWINGS

*by*

H. FLETCHER

*With 32 Illustrations*

LONDON

STANLEY PAUL & CO. LTD.





Made and Printed in Great Britain at  
*The Mayflower Press, Plymouth.* William Brendon & Son, Ltd.

TO  
MRS. RALPH BERNERS  
AND  
MRS. CAMERON-BINGHAM  
TO WHOM I  
OWE SO MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT  
AND FOR WHOM  
I HAVE  
SUCH A DEEP REGARD



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## FOREWORD

**I**N this work there are only plain, simple words with no efforts at adornment.

I have used words and expressions which are common to myself. I realize that they may not be good English, but I hope they possess the virtue of being clear.

“FOURFACES,”  
Colchester.





# SEVEN CANTONMENTS

## CHAPTER I

(1)

THE October night was fine, but a heavy bank of cloud lay above London, and reflected from it was the red-rose glow from the city, resembling that seen on clouds above an active volcano.

Piccadilly was a shadow of its earlier activity as I turned down Duke Street towards my flat and bed. A woman, stepping slowly, smiled; a high-powered car, driven with abandon by a smart young woman, made me skip with undignified agility across Jermyn Street, and, close to the bottom of the street, two taxi drivers were arguing on the pavement close to their cabs. In the shop windows were the same type of pictures I knew so well. Oil painting depicting groups of flowers and fruit, out of which protruded dead game; or perhaps they were portraits of smug men, or stupid women. Then came the rows of shoes in the boot-makers, and necklaces of second-hand gems in the antique dealers' shops. So few people ever seemed to enter these shops that I have always wondered how their owners made a living.

It was nearer one a.m. than midnight when I turned the corner into King Street and came to the doorway leading to the flat. The party had been a good one and

I was feeling well content, not thinking of what might be awaiting me behind the door I was unlocking. It swung open, and, switching on the light, I saw something lying on the mat which made my heart beat faster. It was a buff-coloured envelope, delivered by the last post, and on it was stamped the ominous letters O.H.M.S. and also the words 'War Office.' I picked it up in haste, knowing that it contained news of what my fate for the next few years was to be.



It needs a distinct effort to open, and read, what is known to be a fateful letter, for it may contain the shattered remains of long-cherished hopes. If young, the disappointment can be bitter, but, later in life, you become prepared for the worst and shrug your shoulders.

In the dimly-lighted, draughty passage, I tore open the envelope and read, among other things: 'You will hold yourself in readi-

ness to embark for India at Southampton in the H.M.T. *Devon* on the 1st of January.' The letter did not end, as I think it should have done, with the words: 'And God have mercy on your soul.' It declared that the person who signed it was my obedient servant. I wished most heartily that, in actual fact, he had been so.

I allowed the news to sink into my consciousness, but it was an appreciable time before I fully realized all that it meant. The end was in sight. The flat must be given up, invitations cancelled, or refused, and the packing begin. Worst of all was the fact that the delights of London must be exchanged for the hot, dusty plains of India, with their boredom and discomforts.

The following morning, after a restless night, Mrs. Cameron, our Scottish housekeeper, woke me with tea, letters, and the newspaper, and I broke to her the news of my impending departure. She was flatteringly disturbed and made many clicking and sucking noises to express her sympathy, and I was given to understand that the sun for her had gone from the light of the morning. Drawing back the curtains with a flourish she made a philosophic observation as to how things did happen suddenly, and, as she left the room to prepare my breakfast, I agreed with her.

From my bed I could hear subdued noises from the street which meant it was gradually coming to life. The tea drunk, and the letters glanced through, I got out of bed and went across to the window and looked out. It was an autumn, sunny morning, full of promise, where a milkman and a street cleaner were passing the time of day outside the chemist's shop, whose general factotum was busily cleaning the windows. Two assistants stood despondently awaiting the coming of someone to unlock the grill of the optician's next door, and the smoke from the fires of the club on the corner rose slowly and straight, like that from a sacrifice, into the clear, glowing sky.

For once the sight of these things I knew and liked failed to please; I was filled with a sense of foreboding, for, during sleep, my subconscious mind had digested the disturbing news of the night before. When lying in the pleasantly warm water of the bath a few moments later, I debated with myself as to whether it would not be better for me to throw up army life and continue to live the existence to which I was most suited. Why should I endure the discomforts of a troopship; the effort needed to take over that battery awaiting me in

Peshawar on the North-West Frontier of India; and the combating of the sense of futility which sweeps over those who are forced to strive and compete with seniors who work only for their own selfish ends? On the other hand I should be well paid, given a chance to wander again, and perhaps might meet one or two interesting people with whom I could make friends. Yes, it was not as bad as it seemed on first awakening, and from the kitchen next door came the delectable odour from Mrs. Cameron's frying mushrooms and bacon, backed by that of fragrant coffee. Perhaps it was Leo, the sign of the Zodiac under which I was born, stirring in his lofty home. It would be better not to thwart him.

Later in the morning, after prolonged and delicate negotiations in a room of the stock department of my bank, I found myself outside on Piccadilly in a semi-dazed condition. I had sold certain shares I knew, but exactly what fresh ones had been purchased was by no means clear. I had set out meaning to buy shares in five different companies, but, as the advice of two separate brokers and the bank differed on the subject, not only with me, but with themselves, the matter had become an extremely complicated one. Books of thickness had been consulted on my behalf, and masses of figures produced. I had also been asked my views on Germany, the weather, the abdication, and, finally, requested to make a choice in the matter of the shares and so, torn with doubt, I did so and hurriedly departed.

Piccadilly throbbed with activity, the sunshine was warm and friendly, and so, walking westward I gradually came back to normal. When about to cross the road to the north side, I was stopped and warmly greeted by a complete stranger who was tall, cadaverous, and dressed

in a well-worn blue suit. I stared at him blankly and wondered if I ought to know who he was.

"I'm Jones. We met out in Hong Kong. Don't you remember me?" he enquired, peering into my face.

"To be quite frank," I replied, "I cannot recall ever having seen you before."

"Of course I was up in Canton for most of the time. But I knew all about you."

I stared at him. How much, and what was it he knew about me? There is always something so mentally disturbing when a stranger makes a statement of this kind. I decided that the matter must be investigated, and so asked the man to come and have a drink with me. He, however, refused, saying that he must depart instantly to keep an appointment. With a friendly wave of the hand he left me. Why should we have met? There must have been some reason behind it, but I failed to see it.

Crossing the road I came to Hatchedts, where I was saluted by the amiable and be-medalled commissionaire, and going down the stairs I turned right and entered the small bar where so many of those who wander up and down the world gather in the forenoon. It was crowded and the air thick with smoke. Scottie<sup>1</sup> was behind the bar and she greeted me with her usual cheery smile as I edged towards the left-hand side.

"Good morning, Scottie," I said.

"Good morning, dear," she replied, and busied herself with the needs of her customers. "How are things to-day?"

"Not so good. I've had my sailing orders."

Scottie was surprised and interested. "Where to? Tell me."

"India."

<sup>1</sup> She is no longer there.

“My goodness! How do you like that?”

“I am not quite sure, Scottie. But it came as a bit of a shock.”

“Well, dear, I had a shock myself, this morning.” Scottie, for the moment unoccupied, picked up her handbag, opened it, pulled out an envelope, and from it she drew out a cheque, of which I was permitted to catch a fleeting glimpse.

“I never thought that he, of all people, would do a thing like that to me. Really I didn’t.”

“R.D.?” I enquired.

Scottie nodded, ruefully.

“Not for much, I hope?”

“Only two pounds, dear.”

“But, Scottie, why do you do it? You can’t afford it. It seems so silly to me.”

“I don’t know, dear,” she replied. “But there it is. I suppose I shall never see my money.”

An explanation is needed here. Scottie, naturally, has a very large circle of male acquaintances, having been in Hatchetts for many years. Now and again she is asked by one of her customers, whom she knows fairly well and who is short of money, to cash a cheque, or even to accept an I.O.U. for sums ranging from one to five pounds. Out of the kindness of her large heart she often did cash these cheques, in spite of the fact that she owned a large sheaf which had been sent back from various banks, stamped with the ominous words ‘Return to Drawer,’ commonly known as R.D. This means that the person signing the cheque has not sufficient balance at the bank to meet it.

Scottie knew as well as I did, that banks do not take this drastic action on a first, or even a second, occasion, but only when the person concerned is an old offender.

Then there were what I class as the meaner I.O.U.'s, where she had loaned five or ten shillings, or more, to someone who had no intention of ever paying it back to her.

"Look here, Scottie," I said. "I will buy a small picture frame. You can cut off the signatures from some of those R.D. cheques and I will frame them for you. You could keep it here and when somebody next asks you to cash a cheque produce it and say that is why you must refuse."

Scottie, however, shook her head and smiled. We changed the subject. There is little Scottie does not know about male human nature, and much of it is bad.

At the mention of India, several men at the bar had pricked up their ears, for many of them had been, at one time or another, in some part of the Empire. There were those who knew the North-West Frontier; the steamy heat of Bombay or Calcutta; or perhaps it was Aden, Singapore, or Shanghai. There was, for example, Big Boy, a very large person of great good humour, who knew the West Coast of Africa, and he roared a question at me across the bar. Then he laughed, and that laugh shook all the glasses and bottles, and the small stranger beside him stepped backwards in fright.

Before I departed a dozen people had told me all about India, and I felt I knew it so well that it was not really worth going there. But all were loud in their praises of Peshawar and I was deemed to be fortunate in being sent to this station.

As is often the case, men insisted that I must look up Bill, or Sam, or George. Visiting cards were pressed on me upon which had been written strange names and addresses and I was made to promise that I would



really seek out these people and deliver, in some cases, lewd messages.

It is interesting to notice how friendly men can be to each other in a bar. Men who, in their own clubs, treat each other, and especially strangers, as potential pick-pockets, will expand and become even confidential.

(II)

After a further lapse of time another communication from the War Office stated that I was due to take over a draft of men at Southampton, and that I must report for duty in the transport on the day before embarkation. This was indeed an unexpected blow, but by that time I had become prepared for anything and could grin and wonder if some worse fate might not be in store for me.

It was a frightful day when, in the forenoon, I left my club and drove across to Waterloo: a day of gloom, drizzle, and black slush underfoot, and it made me almost glad to be leaving for clear skies and brilliant sunshine. But in that taxi my heart sank as, once again, I contemplated all that lay before. The discomfort of the troopship, almost certain seasickness, and a tiny cabin shared with someone whom I should doubtless loathe. He would be noisily sick, throw his possessions all over the cabin, cough, grumble, and steal all the hot water, and, for the sake of peace, I should endure these things in silence for three long weeks.

At Waterloo there was a difference of opinion between myself and the taxi cab driver over the number of pieces of hand luggage. I had a typewriter, attaché-case, toilet bowl, shoe-box, a helmet case, as well as three suit-cases. Without bitterness we argued, and as usual

I was forced to give way and a grinning porter snatched up the assortment and wafted it to the train.

In due course another laden taxi-cab slid through the dock gates at Southampton, and shortly I saw the familiar outlines of the troopship, where she lay tied up to one of the many wharves. The usual white in colour, with a broad blue band running along her sides, she owned a single, yellow funnel.

Here are a few facts which are not generally known regarding this form of ocean transport. Troopships are hired by the War Office from certain shipping companies for the purpose of conveying troops to and fro from the various stations abroad during the season, which lasts from October until April or May. The company concerned make certain structural alterations and carry troops at so much per head. The various responsibilities on board are shared between the army and the company in a rather complicated manner.

Troopships generally carry about fifteen hundred men of all ranks, the accommodation varying considerably with each individual shipping company. The men are placed on what are known as troop decks, which lie fore and aft, and each deck, of which there are several, one above the other, holds about 330 men. Long, narrow tables are set at right angles to the ship's sides and each will seat fourteen men. These tables are known as messes and each is numbered. The men take their meals at them and stow their kit above on racks. Each mess is in charge of a junior N.C.O. whose duty it is to see that meals are properly served and that order is kept. The men on the troop decks sleep in hammocks in the same manner as sailors in a warship. For these modern times this accommodation is, to say the least of it, poor, and these decks in a rough sea, or when moving

through the tropics, have to be experienced to be understood, where the atmosphere in the early mornings is quite unbelievable.

Officers have the usual first-class accommodation, and the married W.O.s, N.C.O.s, and men and their families are given second and third-class berths.

For each voyage there is appointed an Officer Commanding, an Adjutant, Quartermaster, and Baggage Officer. The Officer Commanding Troops is responsible for discipline and the issuing of all orders, but the master looks after the cleanliness, feeding, and life-boat drill, and he has a ship's officer, known as the Troop Officer, to assist him and to act as a go-between.

The *Devon* was lying beside a huge re-echoing shed, where I got my berthing card and then proceeded to go into the ship by way of the usual steep gangway. My cabin was situated in a small passageway leading off the saloon on the upper deck. It was the size of a small bathroom and in it were two bunks, a wardrobe, a chest of drawers, a wash basin, and about three feet of space in which to move about and to dress or undress. I gazed at it in despair, hating small bedrooms, especially when forced to share one with a complete stranger.

I soon learned that my cabin mate, who was arriving the next morning, was a colonel commanding an Indian infantry regiment, and at this news my heart sank still farther until it was somewhere about my knees. I knew quite a lot about Indian colonels, who are reputed to be intolerant, and to own livers of great size. He would, doubtless, take the lower berth, demand every available inch of room, and snarl by day and snore by night, and I wondered what I had done to deserve such a fate, even if it were only a temporary one.

With all my baggage in the cabin I could just turn

around, but from long practice I was soon able to stow most of it away as discreetly as was possible. Even so my companion would be enraged at the lack of space left for his use, but by that time I did not care what he said, or did.

A few hours later I leaned over the rails of the ship and wondered how I should pass the evening. It was New Year's Eve and I was alone, very much so, a fine drizzle was falling and the docks were as gloomy and dismal as only such places can be at such a time. I decided I would set out and see what the port had to offer in the way of amusements.

There are more pleasant experiences than that of wandering out into the damp, dark streets of a large port on the eve of departure for a long, and possibly uneasy voyage. In one of the deserted streets, which lead away from the docks towards the middle of Southampton, I was accosted by a burly person whose discerning eye had picked me out as a soldier. He required, it appeared, beer with which to celebrate the coming of the New Year, and, being an old soldier and out of work, he was not able to procure it. To escape from his persistence I was forced to go into a shop and buy something I did not want.

There came, at last, a bar, remembered of old, and here I found a cheerful, friendly atmosphere which warmed my heart, where a barmaid with the largest bosom I have ever seen on any woman laughed, joked, and ministered to our needs. She, among other things, said that she was going to a dance later in the evening, and I wondered who would be brave enough to dance with her, for it would resemble clutching a vast feather bolster.

Some hours later I returned to the ship and my tiny,

coffin-like bunk. Knowing that my cabin mate would expect to sleep in the lower berth I scrambled up into the upper where I found the usual, strangely made bed. Why is it that ship's stewards never make a bed in the normal manner? They take a sheet, a blanket, and a coverlet, place one inside the other and put it on the lower sheet, without making any attempt to tuck it in, with the result you are awakened several times during the night with a chilled back, feet, or chest.

The following morning began badly. Firstly, I was told that I was to take charge of nearly three hundred gunners who would arrive at odd hours, by various trains from stations scattered all over England; secondly, the day was a vile one because, from a leaden sky, full of dreary clouds, rain streamed down in a hopeless, dismal manner, and the ship and quayside were flooded with escaping water. Damp individuals scrabbled up and down the gangway clutching hats, papers, and parcels.

The first troop train drew slowly into the platform on the far side of the embarkation shed shortly after nine o'clock, and each carriage window was filled with soldiers who gazed out with curious eyes upon those waiting to receive them. The men, coming from a dozen different regiments, had to be sorted out, and in consequence, there were many boards placed at suitable intervals in the shed and each was numbered. At a given signal the carriage doors were flung open and the men poured out on to the platform. Each was hung about with various kinds of military equipment, and every man clutched two kitbags, both of which were crammed to their utmost capacity. The men, slightly bewildered, were pounced upon by waiting officers, or embarkation staff, and shooed and guided on to their correct boards, where they fell in in two ranks. Here a roll was called

to see that none was missing, either by mischance, or evil intention.

To an unenlightened observer the scene would now have appeared to be entirely chaotic, but, in reality, it was very much orderly confusion. The huge, dim cavern which was the shed, was filled with strange noises, where shouts, raised voices, and excited questionings could be heard above the tramp of heavy boots, rumbling of trucks, and the bumps of mishandled luggage. Around, about, and between the patiently waiting lines of men a great variety of people moved to and fro on urgent business. Fatigue parties consisting of perspiring troops were moving baggage to the cranes, people of all kinds, with glad cries pounced upon what had either been mislaid, or lost belongings ; and officers of degree, and lesser degree, argued with shipping agents, sought information from the embarkation staff, or hunted out the men of the drafts of which they were in charge.

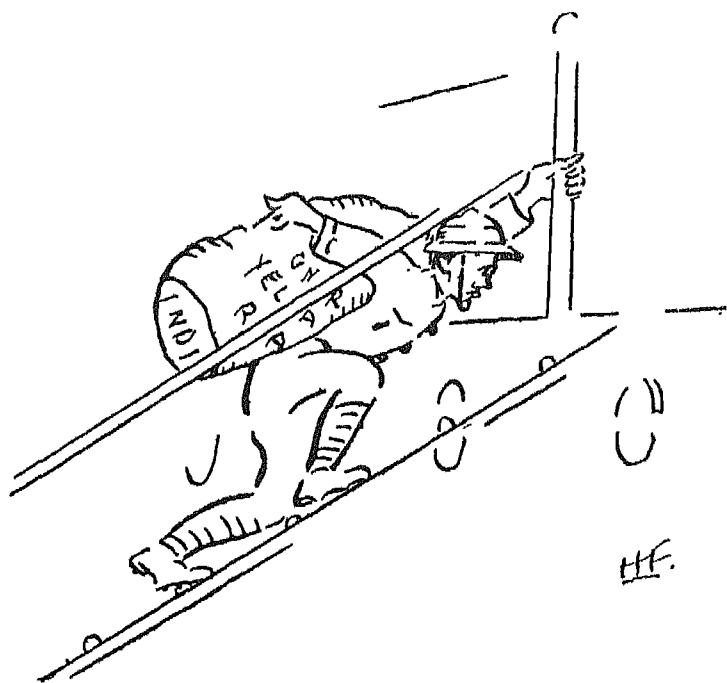
Agitated families searched for this, or that, including relatives and friends who had come to see them off, and hurrying porters added to the animated scene. Now and again, out of the crowd, there appeared a red-capped military policeman whose behaviour was not unlike that of the Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*. It will be remembered that she constantly cried : " Off with his head." Our policeman, as often, cried : " Out with that cigarette," in firm and loud tones, even to Lordly Ones besides lesser beings. Smoking was strictly forbidden in the shed, and many were those who wandered in with pipes or cigarettes in their mouths.

### (III)

The left-hand man in the front rank of a large Gunner draft which was waiting for orders was a short, sturdy

youth with troubled blue eyes and a snub nose. Gunner Yelland was feeling distinctly unhappy, and in the process of being torn away from the life he knew and understood he did not welcome all the unknown that was before him. He stood and watched the activity taking place around him, and remembered how his mother had wept copiously when he left his home to return to barracks at the end of his embarkation furlough. These thoughts added to his depression, besides he was feeling tired and hungry, and had smoked too many cigarettes during that long and tiresome train journey, where he had sat tightly packed between two knobbly companions.

A loud-voiced sergeant-major, wearing a white arm band, suddenly appeared on the scene and, calling the draft to attention, told it to turn to its left and to follow



a guide into the transport. Clutching his remaining kit-bag, Gunner Yelland marched through the wide iron doorway and on to the streaming quay where, in his heavily nailed boots, he staggered, and slipped, as he toiled up the steep gangway. On stepping aboard he was engulfed in a seething mass of men, among whom the guide became lost. He stood bewildered for a moment, until the guide, realizing that he was not being followed, returned and said rude things in a loud, coarse voice.

Gunner Yelland, followed by the remainder of the draft, found himself forcing his way down a long, narrow deck on which there was a continual stream of people passing in both directions. Eventually he came to an open piece of deck in the fore part of the ship where there was a jumble of deck furniture, among which were boats, derricks, and strange projections of all kinds.

Keeping a wary eye on the guide he entered the interior of the ship by one of several hatches which stated in large, black letters painted on them that they led below to the troop decks. Steep wooden stairs led downwards, and around corners, through deck after deck, until Gunner Yelland began to wonder whether they were going to touch the bottom of the ship.

At last a halt was called on a long, low deck which stretched from one side of the ship to the other. It smelled of soap, wet wood, and a new, curious, and hardly distinguishable odour, which might have been that of stale biscuits. Tables jutted out from the sides of the ship, and above them were long wooden racks and a multitude of strong hooks. These hooks fascinated Gunner Yelland because they closely resembled those in the village butcher's shop where his mother bought the Sunday joint, and he wondered what their use could be.



An N.C.O. pointed to one of the tables and told him that this was his mess, that the number was 66, and he was to stow his kit in the rack above it. Several other men joined him from the stream which was pouring down the stairs, and there was much confusion, jostling, and good-humoured chaff.

No sooner had Gunner Yelland carefully put his kit-bag up in the rack than he was told to pull it down again, take out his canvas and rubber-soled shoes and put them on in place of his heavy boots, which were not to be worn in the ship.

There followed two hours of complete bewilderment, when he was one of hundreds of men detailed to do this, or that, and none knew how, or where, to carry out the orders. Cursed for asking questions of busy N.C.O.s, and pushed here and there, he finally took refuge on deck, where he leaned miserably over the rails, oblivious to the pouring rain. Even here he was not long left in peace, for an officer appeared and ordered him below.

Once again on his own troop deck, which took him some time to find, he was pounced upon, given a large oval can and a pail, and told to go off and get the dinner for his mess of fourteen men. On asking from where he was to get it, an N.C.O. pointed vaguely towards the upper deck. After twenty minutes of frantic searching, mostly in the wrong direction, Gunner Yelland joined a crowd of men who were standing outside the galley. When his turn came one of several white-clad cooks, with a red, hot-looking face, snatched his can and, after asking how many men were in his mess, proceeded to ladle out quantities of savoury looking and smelling stew. Dark-brown, steaming tea was produced in a like manner and, in due course, he arrived back at his mess,

but not before he had some narrow escapes, when he might have spilled everything he carried so carefully.

An N.C.O. at the end of the table cursed him for the delay, and then proceeded to serve the men who were seated and awaiting the coming of the food. Gunner Yelland pushed himself into a place at the table and handed down his plate. He found himself wedged in between two men who were unknown to him, and he had some difficulty in wielding his knife and fork.

The man on his left, he noted, was a messy feeder, who champed his food with noisy appreciation. Every now and again this man, on discovering some portion in the stew which did not meet with his approval, scraped it off his plate on to the bare board of the table. This sort of thing seemed unnecessary to Gunner Yelland, whose mother had always insisted upon decent manners at table, and many were the raps over the knuckles he had received for carelessness in this matter. He glanced down the table and saw that several others had cleared their plates in this manner, and he wondered if they would have done so in their own homes.

The messy feeder turned to Gunner Yelland, looked at him, and asked: "Where've you come from, mate?"

"Woolwich," replied Gunner Yelland, amiably.

"Oh. Was you in Snifter's squad?"

"Yes, I was."

"Blimy. So was I, when I was at the depôt," said the man, deeply impressed with this coincidence. He broke off a hunch of his bread and started to clean his plate with it. He ate the result. "What's yer name?"

Gunner Yelland told him and learned, in return, that his companion's name was Clarver, Joe Clarver in fact.

"Got a fag, mate?"

Gunner Yelland pulled out a crumpled packet of cigarettes and offered it as he learned that Gunner Clarver had come from Aldershot, which he had not liked.

"A bloody joint, I can tell you," he said. "They worked us like slaves, they did. Always out on some — manœuvres or other. The old man (the major commanding the battery) was a 'oly terror, he was. Yer couldn't fox him. Cute old devil. Where are you going to? I'm for Rawalpindi."

Gunner Yelland replied that he thought he was going to Ambala, but that he was not quite sure, because it had been changed at the last moment, or so he had been told.

"India ain't a bad spot, so I've been told," continued Gunner Clarver. "Not much work, lots o' fun, and plenty of niggers to do yer fatigues. Yer gets good pay, so I'm told."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by an N.C.O. of senior rank appearing and telling Gunner Clarver instantly to put out his cigarette, because smoking below decks was not allowed. Gunner Clarver did as he was told with very bad grace indeed, and his remarks concerning the N.C.O., when he was out of hearing, do not bear repeating, but they made the men at the table grin, for they were pungent in the extreme, and with humour of a crude kind.

The hours before lights-out passed slowly for Gunner Yelland. He wandered about the troop deck, found the washing places and latrines, returned to the mess table where he sat and read a magazine, or talked to anyone who would listen. Later in the day he was told to go farther below in the ship to a room where he drew his blankets and a hammock. After some difficulty he learned

how to sling his hammock, and the reason for all the hooks above his head.

The following morning, after a restless night of much discomfort in the strange canvas bag, he awoke to find men tumbling out of their hammocks in all directions. Throwing off his blankets he followed their example, and having slept in his socks, underpants, and shirt, he was soon dressed by pulling on his trousers and canvas shoes. As soon as the hammock and blankets had been carefully rolled up and stowed away in the room below, he caught up a towel and soap and went off to the wash basins.

It was then, for the first time, he realized that the deck was moving about in a strange, heaving manner, and that he had had some difficulty in keeping his balance. Waves were slapping and hissing against the closed portholes, and the atmosphere on the troop deck reeked with stale breath, unwashed human body, and clothes, smelly from perspiration. Gunner Yelland, however, was used to this, and it did not worry him unduly, but there was an uneasy feeling deep down in his stomach which made itself felt every time the ship rolled or pitched.

He had washed his face and neck and was in the act of drying himself, when the man at the next basin suddenly turned away and was violently seasick in a nearby corner. From that moment onwards life became a burden to Gunner Yelland, and he gradually became more miserable, and wretched, than he could have imagined was possible.

The troopdeck soon was strewn with prostrate bodies who, now and again, turned over on their sides and were very seasick. Gunner Yelland tried going on deck, but here the violent wind and rain soon drove him below again, where complete nausea took hold of him.

He sat down at his mess table, held his head in his hands, and tried not to notice what was going on round about, but this was not possible. He fought for a long time, but at last gave up and lay down on the hard deck in a state of semi-coma, lost to everything but his own utter misery. There we will leave him, to return later.

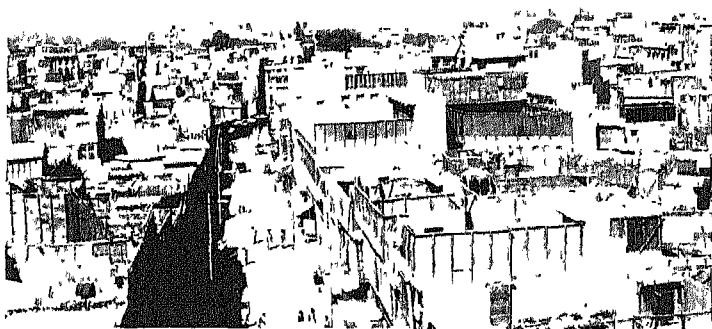
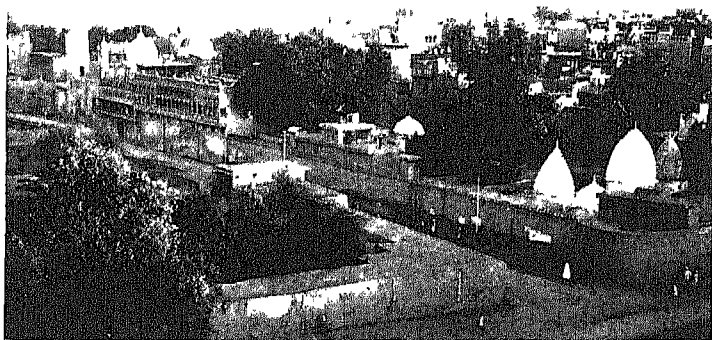
(IV)

On this morning of embarkation, having passed on the responsibilities for arriving drafts to juniors, I was left more or less on my own, but every now and again I descended from the ship, entered the shed and bestowed on my hard-working assistants an air of benevolent regard.

As the morning drew on, more and yet more troop trains arrived, disgorged their contents, and departed to make room for others, whilst a continual stream of men poured into the ship to vanish below decks.

The first class portion of the ship soon became thronged with a dense mass of moving people. Colonels and subalterns, wives and sisters, aunts and mothers, friends and officials, stewards and men carrying strange assortments of luggage, all seethed together in more or less damp masses. There was even a bishop present and he, elated by all the excitement, greeted me with quite unbishop-like language.

An air of bewilderment, doubt, disbelief, or diffidence was to be seen on many a face not already clouded by worry, anxiety, or gloom. Old friends, meeting unexpectedly in passageways, greeted each other with glad cries, and demands to be told what they were doing in the ship. Agitated subalterns holding whispered conversations, and chance met acquaintances, all blocked some



PESHAWAR CITY



important exit or entrance, where they got thoroughly in the way of those on urgent business.

In the saloon were large and small groups of people sitting at tables holding those mysterious last moment conversations, so dear to the feminine heart, and which are endured with patience by the male. In the smoking room there were other groups, but these consisted mainly of men, some of whom were striving to repair the ravages of the night before. In one corner was a young Scotsman who had by no means thrown off the New Year's Eve after effects, and he was entertaining a party of friends. Their drinks came fast, vanishing even more swiftly, and, in consequence, they became a target for scandalized comment from those more staid. But they cared not at all, and at least one of the visitors was guided off the ship in a semi-helpless condition.

Either being seen off, or seeing people off, in a troopship is an unsatisfactory business at the best of times. Should you, however, be seeing off an enemy who is being despatched to some loathsome corner of the earth, then the affair can be an exquisite pleasure, but this is rare. By accident I once met an enemy in such circumstances, and knowing full well that he hated the idea of being sent abroad, I derived a shameful pleasure from describing, in gruesome detail, all that lay before him. Normally, however, it is a tiresome, depressing, and often expensive business. Your visitors arrive in a bunch, late, and when there are no vacant seats remaining. They demand to see your cabin, ask countless inane questions, offer advice, and expect to be plied with expensive drinks. Should a dear friend appear, then you are torn with emotion, all conversation melting into dumb misery.

The visitors in the *Devon* were at last shooed ashore, to



stand in damp dreariness, taking what cover they could from the rain by leaning against the tin walls of the embarkation shed. All of us who were able, lined the rails and looked down at them. The departure of this ship, from semi-comedy, had become tragic, and we who have been forcibly parted from those of whom we are very fond, know what many were feeling at this particular moment. There were brave, trembling smiles from the womenfolk, who would later go off to a cinema to try to dull the pain of the amputation.

The last hawser was slipped and slowly we slid away, waving back to the wet, diminishing figures on the quay. Inexorably the strip of water between them and us widened. Passively I looked down at the bubbles tearing along the side of the ship, for emotion had given place to that shelter in trifles which so often comes to us when Fate really gets you by the throat.

The figures vanished, we were now exiles—another chapter was ended : but I came back to realities, thought of my flat in St. James's and felt unhappy.

The Indian Army colonel and I met in the cabin, and I was almost aggrieved to find him entirely different to what I had pictured him to be, for he did not run true to type, being tall, youngish, good-looking, and with a charming smile which he turned on for my benefit. I liked him instantly but he, however, put himself in my power by apologizing profusely for bringing into the cabin a large wooden box. I replied that its presence enhanced the cabin, and in return regretted the amount of space which I had occupied. We kept up this Oriental game of politeness for some moments until I opened the subjects on which I had definite views.

Myself: "Of course you will have the lower bunk?"

Colonel : " I really don't mind at all. The top one will do me all right."

I looked at him closely to see if he really meant this, and my pause clearly showed that I desired the lower bunk. This was not lost on the colonel, who asked :

" Are you a good sailor ? "

Myself : " I'm not sure. I can, at times, be a very poor one."

Colonel : " Then that settles it. You must have the lower one. I am never upset."

I did, and it was not until the voyage was nearly over that the colonel casually remarked that I had not been seasick, nor indeed shown any signs of being so. He seemed to think that I had managed the affair quite skilfully.

Choosing where you will sit in the dining-saloon, even in great liners, is often fraught with dire consequences, and the possibilities are varied. Whoever sits beside you does so for the voyage, unless you are rescued by some kind friend. You may be caught by the ship's bore ; a stupid, giggling woman ; or someone with an ailment, or worse, a grievance. In a troopship these risks are doubled, and knowing this, I elected to sit on the right of the Troop Officer at the head of his table, for he was cheerful, and had a twinkle in his eye. Who else was to be at the table of seven, except a pal on my right, I did not care.

Shortly after seven o'clock that night I left the smoking-room and descended to the dining-saloon, and sitting down in my place at table I waited to see who would appear. The first were two young subalterns who sat themselves down as far away as was possible, eyeing me with speculation and apprehension, and when I

spoke and smiled at them they blushed. Then came my pal, and close upon his heels a nursing sister, who sat down opposite to me. She was a buxom, healthy, pretty girl, who turned out to have lots of common sense and breeding, and I learnt later that she had taken up nursing to show her family that she was capable of doing so. The Troop Officer, a youngish, small man with a cheerful, lined face, and blue eyes, arrived with a flourish.

The meal began, and, as usual on such occasions, everyone present eyed everyone else, and we sought to make elegant conversation, which I quickly realized would not reach a very high standard. This proved to be true, but I gained a good deal of quiet amusement during the voyage from the nursing sister's valiant efforts to get her own back upon me for a certain remark I made regarding her sex, and to which she had taken serious objection.

The Troop Officer, one evening at dinner, was discussing with me that amusing film actress, Miss Mae West. Turning to the table at large, I remarked that all women were, at heart, what Miss West portrayed them to be, but that few had the courage to live up to their instincts. In case some readers may not have seen Miss West on the films, I will explain that she nearly always plays the role of an unblushing hunter of men, using quite openly all the nefarious wiles known to women down the ages. The results are startling and illuminating to a retiring male.

The nursing sister was inclined to take my remark as a personal matter, but she was never quite sure whether I really meant what I said, and I will also leave the reader in doubt.

At tables nearby a variety of types took their places,

some differing so violently from each other as to be ludicrous. Half right from us was a table at which there were the airman and his friend ; one was clever and a little sardonic, the other amiable and easy-going, and they sat for hours in odd corners of the ship and talked, and I was led to speculate upon what they could have in common. Next to them, at the same table, were the padre and his wife. He was a typical vicar, but his wife wore quite unsaintly clothes which she changed frequently and showed off with deep satisfaction.

Then there was the young officer sitting at a table exactly opposite, whom I never saw smile but once on the whole voyage. Whenever his table was convulsed with mirth, as it often was, he looked about with a puzzled, rather pained expression. Then there was the very, very ugly young fellow who infuriated several people by being something of a lady's man.

The remaining outstanding character was a young subaltern who was a charming, but unmitigated, young devil, who will, I am sure, one day come to a bad end. For an officer of his age, AND training, it was unusual to find that he cared not one jot for what people said, or thought, about him. I came to like him, although his conduct, now and again, took my breath away, so outrageous was it. He shocked the staid, infuriated the pious, and violated nearly every known Service tradition, and as a result he was loathed, liked, and anathematized, but he neither knew nor cared. What a joyous state this is in youth, but how dangerous. So many of us spend our lives ordering our existences according to other people's supposed wishes, that we merely become animated mirrors of the minds of those among whom we happen to be living.

There were several other people in this ship that I

should like to mention, but I do not wish to be either libellous or unkind.

Out into the Channel and across the Bay we rolled and pitched, where dirty grey skies hung above and lustreless waves beat savagely against our sides. Those of us who were able walked the deck, ate, read, talked, or wrote letters until this became a routine, but the dullness was sometimes relieved by the ringing of the alarm bells, at which everyone was supposed to make for their cabins as rapidly as possible, don a lifebelt, and go to the appointed place. In reality, people muttered curses, stopped what they happened to be doing, and went off vaguely in the direction of their cabins, to appear again, in due course, looking as if they had suddenly developed enormous goitres.

(v)

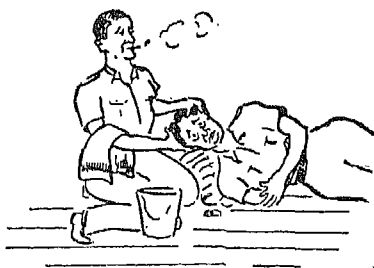
Once in the Mediterranean the *Devon* settled down and no longer behaved as if she were an intoxicated charlady going home after a night out among the gin palaces. People emerged from their cabins wearing wan expressions, and tottered to deck-chairs, where they slowly came back to normal. But let us go below and see how Gunner Yelland has fared during bad weather.

No longer are the troop decks a scene of acute misery, because the men were gradually becoming able to face their food, and Gunner Yelland, in particular, was surprised to find that he no longer wished for death. Gunner Clarver had been aggressively fit during the whole ghastly period, and he had been alternately hated and envied by Gunner Yelland.

"Come on, mate," he had said several times. "Yer

ain't nearly as bad as yer thinks yer are. Have a drop of tea and yer'll feel pounds better."

But Gunner Yelland had turned over on his side and begged to be left alone. His friend, however, had persisted and became a nurse, fetching coats to make a pillow on the hard deck, bringing drinking water, and even forcibly washing his thoroughly ungrateful friend. One morning his efforts were rewarded by Gunner Yelland asking for tea, and actually drinking a whole mugful of it. Gunner Clarver there-upon dragged him up on the deck where the cool, fresh air cheered him considerably.



Gunner Yelland came back to normal so rapidly that he was able to take part in and make a little money at the game of 'House.' It was two o'clock one afternoon when he ran into his friend, Gunner Clarver, on deck, where he was one of a crowd of men who were lying, sitting, squatting, and perched cross-legged on one of the hatches. Each man was staring down with absorbed attention at a long, grubby piece of cardboard in front of him. To one side sat a man calling out numbers and every now and again one of the men would place a match-stick, or a tiny piece of orange peel, on a number on his card. Gunner Yelland leaned over his friend and watched, but suddenly Gunner Clarver barked out the word 'House' with such vigour that he was nearly pushed over backwards.

This was the game of 'House,' known among the troops as Housey-Housey, it being a game peculiar to the army, and troopships in particular. It is the only

gambling game, if it can so be called, that is permitted. It is simple to play, but the language used in conducting it cannot be so called, and to those new to the game, it can be bewildering.

Each player buys from the banker one or more cards, at a price which may range from one penny to three. They are nine inches long and three wide, and each has printed, on one side only, groups of numbers selected from one to ninety. A typical card is arranged in this manner :

	1	14	44	76	89
5	28	39	77	80	
13	30	79	82	90	

The banker's assistant has a large bag containing round, fat, wooden discs, each of which is stamped with a number from one to ninety. When everything is ready, and each player has a card, and all payments made, the assistant shakes the bag and calls out 'Look in,' upon which every player's eyes become glued on to the card before him. Putting his hand into the bag the assistant pulls out a disc, looks at the number on it and calls it out *and whoever has that particular number on his card* at once notes the fact by covering it in some manner. The winner is he who has first covered all the numbers on his card. The game can be varied, however, by selecting the first five numbers to appear, or a line, or combination of lines.

On the cry of 'House' the banker collects the card in question and the correctness is verified. The lucky man then receives the pool less a small percentage which goes to the banker.

During the game the following quaint expressions

are used : 1 is Kelly's Eye ; 10 is Downing Street ; 11 is Legs Eleven ; 66 is Clickity Click ; 90 is Top of the House. All the double numbers, such as 44 or 77, are called All the fours, or All the sevens, whilst 20's and 30's etc., are Blind twenty, or Blind thirty. Finally all the numbers below ten, except one, are prefaced by the word, Number.

I have often played the game on a voyage, when it is sometimes produced in the smoking-room after dinner, where, if the pool is large, considerable excitement and tension can be experienced when your card is full with the exception of one number. You wait and wait, and every other possible number seems to be called out before the one you need. In the meantime somebody cries ' House ' and this means the game is over, and that you have been thwarted. You hand over another threepence, or sixpence, and hope for better luck next time.

For the remainder of the voyage Gunner Yelland found life to be a pleasant, easy thing, spending much of his time lying about on the deck, reading, talking, or even just sleeping.

(vi)

At the southern end of the Red Sea, and when moving towards Aden, we were surprised to see clouds shrouding the sandy foreshore, and the nearer we drew towards Aden itself the heavier they became, until at last we saw that Little Aden was actually covered in low-lying mists. Over Aden itself hung two fat cloudlets looking as if they were compact masses of cotton wool.

Visiting Aden for the first time is always something of a thrill, because everyone has heard such dreadful stories



of the place, with its barrenness, heat, boredom, and lack of even the minor luxuries of life.

The first view of the colony, gained when entering the inner harbour, certainly seems to bear out at least a part of these things of which we have read, or been told, by friends. The dark brown hills rise tier by tier in jagged confusion to the great central peak of Shum Shum, and there is no vegetation to be seen, and the only green is that of the paint on a few of the bungalows. A damp, moist atmosphere closes down as the ship loses speed, and finally ties up at a buoy not far from the foreshore.

In a short space of time a host of small boats, each containing a number of excited Somalis, tore out from the shore and clustered about our sides. Here they offered an assortment of goods for sale, where cigarettes, fruit, shawls, pyjamas, and sweets, were the main attractions. Every man on the troop decks hung over the side of the ship, or stuck his head out of a port-hole, and the Somalis did a brisk trade with the easily beguiled soldier. Those troops who had no money commenced to barter their equipment, but this was soon stopped by scandalized officers.

After luncheon, when we passengers were allowed ashore, I left in a small, heavily loaded motor-boat with four of the young subalterns, and on arrival at the landing-stage we set off in a car to visit the tanks.

I have described Aden in another place and so cannot do so again, except to give a more up-to-date impression of this colony, which it has now become.

Through the small township, which now has a large and flourishing garden in its midst, we slid out on to the long road which runs beside the harbour, where the dhow building-yards are situated. Here were the single-storied mud hovels, in which lived the poorer of the

local natives, and they lined both sides of the road. There were camels, donkeys, fowls, broken-down motor cars, battered petrol-tins, beds, household possessions, and hordes of small, semi-naked children strewn by the roadside: also flies, dust, and glare, and that well-known eastern smell whose origin is best left to the imagination.

On this road a long string of camels, who had strayed across the road, held up the motor car and, in doing so, permitted us to witness a quaint little domestic scene. An aged Somali with grey, crinkled hair, and a rather severe cast of countenance was sitting on a *charpoy*, which is a native form of bed, and it was placed against the wall of a hovel, and a low doorway beside it showed a black interior. At his feet was an assortment of junk, including pieces of scrap iron, lumps of wood, and a small, sloe-eyed, round, naked fragment of dark humanity. He was playing with one of his toes when we arrived on the scene, but he looked up and regarded us with an unwinking stare.

I watched him and saw that temptation, in the form of a wandering, incautious, food-hunting cockerel, had come close to his fingers. A most inviting handful of tail feathers was within reach, and the infant could not resist them, so he put out a tiny, fat hand, caught those feathers and tweaked them hard. The cockerel, startled and outraged, squawked loudly. The aged man looked down, saw what was happening, and said something to the child, who immediately pulled a horrible face and gave the feathers another tweak. Bending down, the man picked up the infant, released the loud-voiced fowl, and smacked the child, who broke into piercing yells of fright and woe. With dramatic suddenness a large, young, angry, and half-clad Somali woman shot out of the doorway, snatched the child away and half flung it

through the doorway into the hovel and, turning upon the aged man who had risen from the bed, she stood with her face a few inches from his, and screamed at him. For a moment I thought she was going to assault him. The man, however, lost none of his calm but, lifting a hand, he snapped his fingers contemptuously in the woman's face and turned away. We were prevented from seeing the close of this episode by the car starting forward with a sudden jerk.

We came at last to where the hovels ended and a desolation began. The loose, rubble-covered, ochre slopes rose up to the dark-brown rocks, which, in turn, merged into the main mountain which soared into a bleached sky. A large and untidy Mussulman cemetery lay on one side of the bends in the road, which swung upwards to where the narrow cleft in the hills led to the crater. This, as its name implies, is the bed of an extinct volcano where, during the summer, the heat can rise to unbelievable heights. In the pass we met a long string of lean camels who were evil smelling, and they eyed our approach with deep apprehension and were cursed by their drovers in a fluent, but strange, language.

The cleft in the hills ending abruptly, the whole of the crater appeared below us, with the small gap in the walls directly in front. A large population lives here, but very few, if any, Europeans. There are the vacant British barracks, and even a small church on a hillock, for it was here that badly behaved regiments, in the old days, were sent to repent of their sins, and it was usually a very chastened battalion that finally left this inferno.

The township to-day is clean and not unattractive, as could be seen as we swept through it on our way to the tanks, which are in the right-hand corner. A quaint mixture of peoples move about in the streets, among

whom are Arabs, Somalis, Indians, people from the Yemen and that curious country the Hadramaut; Parsees, Persians, and, finally, those strange tribes who live on the shores of the Red Sea. All are there amid the camels, goats, fowls, and the strange assortment of junk which litters the streets of the East.

Aden is very, very old, and its fortunes have risen and fallen many times, but the colony, curiously enough, has not a drop of water in it, the nearest wells being at Sheikh Othman in the scrub desert several miles away. In the past the crater was supplied with a limited amount of water from these wells, but it was brackish and unpleasant. At Steamer Point, where we landed, water was obtained by distilling sea water, a thoroughly unsatisfactory and expensive business. It was then that the tanks proved their worth.

The tanks are one of the world's unsolved mysteries, and no one knows who built them, although savants have argued, and many points of view have been put forward. The most popular legend is, that the Queen of Sheba built them when passing through Aden on her way to dally with Solomon. There is no foundation of truth in this, and it is not even an established fact that this queen did call at Aden, although it is probable that she did so. No one doubts that these tanks are very old, and the answer appears to be that they were constructed by a race of people of whom we now have no traces.

The tanks lie close beside the lower slope of the rocks which rise to the highest point in the colony, and they are cleverly built to catch the surface rain water. It rains, on an average, once in three years, but one really heavy downpour will fill the tanks, large as they are. One holds well over a million gallons. When filled the water was carefully watched, rationed, and sold.

Until quite recently they were auctioned each year and went to the highest bidder, and should rain fall in that year the lucky purchaser made a large sum of money.

The tanks were accidentally discovered by a British officer with enquiring tendencies who on finding a large hole in the ground of this area caused investigations to be made, with the result that the whole series was unearthed and a huge quantity of rubble cleared away. To-day they are merely one of the sights, because a few years ago a dozen artesian wells were sunk at Sheikh Othman so that the whole colony has now an ample and excellent supply of water. It is an interesting fact that these wells are so deep that the water, on reaching the surface, is unpleasantly hot.

The area is now surrounded by a pleasant garden filled with flowering shrubs and trees, and a small museum stands in the grounds. The tanks themselves are not easy to describe, but they consist of a number of great, irregular-sided pits, each connected to the other by overflows, and cemented channels lead into them from the catchment areas. They are of great depth and vary considerably in size, and it must be a wonderful, but a damp, sight to stand in the rain and watch them fill, a thing few Europeans can have seen.

Acting as a guide I led the party into the grounds, after a rupee per head had been paid, and we stood on the brink of the greatest tank, where far below a small urchin was turning cartwheels on the dry bottom, which he had reached by a flight of steps. His demands for us to throw him pennies came faintly and only half heard.

Once again back at Steamer Point we passed the landing-stage and the Union Club on our way to call upon the Gunner Mess, and it was here that I was most impressed with the changes which had taken place in the

colony since my last visit. In the mess there were electric lights and fans, running water, and long baths, besides other modern equipment, all of which, in the old days, were never even hoped for, much less expected. The lone, lean camel used to bring our few gallons of fresh water each morning, and with that we had to be content, together with the poor, smelly oil-lamps, and useless punkahs.

On the way back to the ship we went into the Union Club to taste one of the well-known Perseus cocktails. Sitting on the wide veranda, which overlooks the harbour at sea-level, we waited a long time for the drinks to appear. I had quite forgotten what they looked like and tasted, but had I remembered they would not have been ordered, for they were decidedly expensive. When they did arrive they were of a curious purple shade, and floating on the liquid in each glass was a layer of whipped cream. I took a good sip from my glass and was horrified but amused when I saw the expressions on the faces of my guests. One man described the taste as that of a mixture of highly scented bath salts and hair oil, and he was not far wrong. We hurried back to the ship and washed away the taste in less exotic forms of alcohol.

Steaming out of Aden on our way north to Karachi the voyage was nearly over, and as is usual on such occasions, a fancy dress dance was arranged. Such things in a troopship are nearly always thoroughly lugubrious affairs, that is if they do not (in the smoking-room) develop into orgies. Our dance, however, was a great success and some of the costumes were not only original, but charming as well. One young subaltern, who most certainly should have been an actor, got himself up as a retired general, one of the type sometimes met with in London clubs. He was complete, even to the bushy white

eyebrows and moustache, all of which were agitated in a realistic manner, and his acting was superb. He came up to me, and this is what he said :

“Haugh.” He blew through his moustache in a ludicrous manner. “Well, my boy, going out to India again, heah? Damn good place in my day. Gone to the dogs, it has. Haugh. When I was a youngster we all went shootin’, pig-stickin’, and fishin’. What! I suppose yer’ll go up to one of those damned hill-stations and hang around the skirts? Damned disgrace I call it. Gone to the dogs it has. Haugh.”

An old gentlemen had used almost those very words to me before leaving London.

Crossing the Arabian Sea, and at sunset time, I went to the stern of the ship to watch for the green ray ; but I never saw it, and never have. This pure green ray can only be seen when the atmosphere on the horizon is perfectly clear, and it occurs exactly as the upper rim of the sun passes below the horizon, and lasts only a few seconds. It is sometimes thought that it can only be seen from the stern of a ship, when at sea, but this is not true, for it has been viewed from the north coast of Cornwall and the west coast of Scotland.

In the stern lived two couples of hounds, destined for a pack in India. The two dogs were always full of life, even in the roughest weather, but the bitches became the picture of abject misery whenever the ship rolled or pitched. One, sitting in her kennel, would raise large mournful eyes, and then turn her head away as if the sight of you made her feel much worse.

How those hounds smelt. It was, in fact, far more than a smell ; it was an awful odour.

## CHAPTER II

(1)

**P**USHED by fussy tugs the *Devon* touched a wharf far down Karachi harbour, and we had arrived. In a few hours those of us who had been in such close company would be scattered over India. A few I hoped to meet again, whilst others I should forget immediately, and when leaning over the rails and watching the crowd on the quay, a fellow came up to me and said :

“ Well, it’s over now. But, you know, I’ve never been on a ship where I have seen so much desire, and where there has been so little chance of making use of it.”

Laughingly I agreed with him.

Among the crowd, which swayed to and fro in the fierce glare, I managed to pick out my old bearer, who had come from Central India to meet me. Rugbar was the first I had had seventeen years before, but he had, however, been in the habit of writing to me at uncertain intervals. He looked up and recognized me, but when I went down the gangway and shook him by the hand I realized that he was now an old man, painfully thin with a cough, but eager to serve me once again.

Returning to the ship, from which we should not disembark until the following day, I received an unexpected shock on learning that I was to be the officer commanding a troop train which was to take into the



far north nearly seven hundred men, officers, and married families. To those who do not know this may not appear to be an unduly responsible or onerous duty, but to me, who have had experience of such trains, it was alarming.

So many disasters can descend upon the officer in charge. Here are a few, for all of which I, as O.C. train, would be held responsible. Losing some of my charges (by no means a difficult thing to happen, and awful are the consequences); damage to the train itself (I should have to pay if the damage could not be traced to some person, or persons); loss or looting of the baggage; cases of sickness through eating forbidden fruit sold by filthy station vendors, or from sitting in the full sun on the sunny side of the carriages; disputes with station buffet managers over the question of payment for goods alleged to have been supplied to men from the train; complaints from a dozen scornful females, who objected to this or that; and, finally, arguments with stupid station-masters who did not realize the necessity for the swift transit of troop trains. I had also to decide where, and when, the train should be stopped, so that the men might get out and stretch their legs, because it must be remembered that travelling in India is a matter of days, and not of hours.

From a wad of papers I learned the details of my fate, but I am glad to be able to say that never have I come across a more thoughtful and efficient embarkation staff than that in Karachi where nothing had been forgotten for our welfare on the journey. The train was to be composed of drafts which were destined for places as far apart as Ambala and Bannu, Lahore and Landi Kotal in the Khyber Pass, and most of them would leave the train in the middle of the night. I was to conduct what

was left of the train to its bitter end at Peshawar, where I was to be stationed.

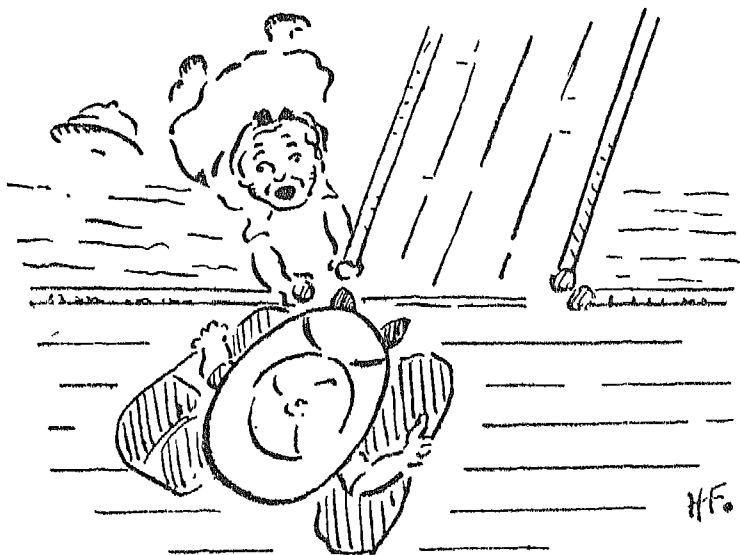
The hundreds of men were to be split up and placed in charge of draft-conducting officers, but I knew that if anything went wrong I was the person who would collect all the nasty remarks which would be poured out from those who make a speciality of such things.

Secret of command in the army consists of two things, decentralization, and a wise choice of those who are to serve you. Decentralization is a charming word, and it means that you pass on as much work and responsibility as possible to subordinates, leaving you free to praise or blame. I now know how to do this, having been decentralized so many times myself in the past, but the choice of subordinates is not easy, although it is surprising how soon you can pick out a willing worker.

I proceeded at once to decentralize by calling a conference of all the officers who were to accompany me on the train. There were twenty-two, some of whom I proceeded to detail for duties. As my adjutant I selected a tall, witty captain in the Royal Tank Corps; the orderly officer was another Tank Corps officer of character; the Baggage Officer was a Gunner captain. There was also a messing officer, a doctor, and the horde of draft-conducting officers, all of whom were warned of the dire penalties that would be the lot of those who disregarded any of the numerous orders which I read out to them.

The following day turned out to be an exhausting one. At 8 a.m. the troop decks were cleared and the men led out of the ship and directed into a great, open-sided shed, where they were to wait until the trains would be ready to receive them. The married families, with their numerous and fantastically shaped handbaggage, and

hordes of children, were led off to suitable waiting-rooms. I was leaning over the rails whilst this was taking place and so witnessed what might have been a very nasty accident. A matron with three children and six packages was attempting to shoo her family down the gangway. Violet was told to go first, then came little Ernest, whose fat legs could only just manage the slats on the steep gangway, and, lastly, naughty Annie. Annie protested in loud and piercing tones that she



would have nothing to do with the horrid gangway. Her mother, very agitated between managing her bundles and watching her children, gave Annie a slight push with a soft bundle, and told her not to be a bad girl. The result of this was, that as little Annie was standing on the top of the gangway, she all but went through the guard rails, and down many feet into the water. I caught my breath in alarm, but Annie was not so easily to be disposed of. She clung and howled with fright, and

rage, whilst a dozen persons rushed to her aid. She was picked up, and carried yelling down the gangway, and placed in safety on the quay. Her mother descended, cuffed her, and demanded to know if her daughter wished to kill her mother with fright.

Later came the ordeal of collecting my baggage and arranging to get it passed through the customs. Enormous piles littered the shed, and distracted passengers sought their belongings, but whilst dealing with my own the messing officer for the train appeared, saying that certain vegetables that he was asked to accept were not fit for human consumption. The issuing staff did not agree with him and would I come at once and give my opinion. I would. In a distant spot a half-filled box of tomatoes was produced for my inspection. They were very part-worn indeed and I said so to the fat *babu*, but it was twenty minutes before fresh vegetables were forthcoming and passed as fit for the men. Hot and angry I returned to the customs shed.

All my luggage had, by this time, appeared and it became necessary to get it passed as quickly as possible, and, above all, without having to open any of it. Seeking the fattest and most amiable of the customs officials, I smiled a tired, pleading smile. Was I not very busy, and were not my men crying out for me, their father? And I could not go to them because of my luggage. Would he, out of the kindness of his heart, attend to me, remembering, of course, my poor, lost men? The fat one smiled knowingly.

“Have you anything to declare?”

“Only two miserable rugs of little value.”

“Will you pay five rupees duty on them?”

Instantly the five rupees were produced. A nearby, and lowly, official was then imperiously summoned and

told to pass all my baggage unopened. Surprised, he prepared to carry out the order, but not before the plump customs official and I had parted with smiles and thanks. In five minutes it was all over, and I departed, leaving those less wise to battle, open securely sealed boxes, pay large sums of money with very bad grace, and, finally, to be unduly delayed.

After luncheon in the ship I set out to find a person called a Troop Conducting Warrant Officer (T.C.W.O.) who was to accompany me on the train, acting as guide and adviser. He and I were to take over the train from the railway officials, and on finding him, I soon discovered that he knew all there was to know about this delicate business.

The train was waiting in a siding, and it was a long one having thirty-two coaches and was, or appeared to be, about half a mile in length. It was made up of troop coaches, each holding sixty-four men, first and second class accommodation, a kitchen car, a canteen, a restaurant car, a hospital, besides numerous baggage wagons. Coach by coach it was expertly examined for possible damage, such as broken windows, damaged latrines, or faulty water supply.

As soon as the train had been taken over I had to settle the difficult problem of allotting accommodation. It was here that the T.C.W.O. proved his value, and I took his advice. When all was arranged, and I was about to return wearily to the ship for tea, an overheated draft-conducting officer appeared on the scene. He had been told to look after sixty-nine men on my train, but he could only find sixty-seven. What was he to do about it? I told him. No sooner had he gone than another officer came up and said that he had been given three extra men in his draft. This meant that they would have to be

squeezed in somewhere in the correct part of the train. Whilst dealing with this awkward situation, and standing in the thick dust under a hot afternoon sun, I became aware of three pink subalterns standing nearby, and awaiting my attention. Who were they? What did they want? They had been told, at the last moment, that they were to come with me, had they? Well they could get into the train where they could: I had allotted the officers' accommodation and was not going to alter it. There was room for them but it would mean four persons to a carriage. At this point a major in a line regiment, who was junior to me, came up and said that I had separated the three officers of his regiment, and that he wished to have them in his compartment. I was rude, quite unnecessarily so, and went off in wrath and gloom, leaving an indignant major behind.

At 7 p.m., the time at which we were due to start, everyone and everything was aboard, and I gave the signal to leave. The train slowly gathered speed, but not without frightful efforts on the part of the engine, whose wheels skidded and then raced. We were past the end of the platform, I had sunk wearily on to my bunk and was being given a whisky and soda by my adjutant, when an excited face appeared in the doorway leading to the corridor. I was informed that a certain Gunner captain was not on the train, and so had been left behind. I shocked my informant by laughing. Well knowing the Gunner in question I could picture his face when he arrived and found that we had gone. No, I had no intention of stopping the train, or of turning back. The face faded away. I knew that he could take a fast taxi and join us at the cantonment station. He did this, and we learned that what had happened was, that he had gone back to the ship for one last farewell and had

lingered unduly, arriving just in time to see our tail light fading into the distance.

The journey up the Indus towards Lahore is one of deadly monotony, where hour after hour the scenery is unchanging, and a flat country-side is either semi-desert or partially cultivated. A few stunted trees are scattered over the landscape; there are occasional glimpses of camels, donkeys, and distant villages, and endless, hot, glaring wayside stations. In winter it is very cold, and in summer it can be hot beyond belief.

The train, as the hours drew out, became more and more behind its timings, and enquiries brought to light the fact that the engine was not able to compete with its gigantic load and was to be changed for a larger one further up the line.

One of the peculiarities of a troop train in India is, that the officer commanding it can halt where and when he likes, and for any reasonable length of time. The only real excitement there was on the journey was caused by one of these halts. I had stopped the train just outside a small station, at a spot which was lighted and a suitable piece of ground where the men could leave their carriages and stretch their legs. On being given leave to vacate the train, men in their hurry leapt down from the foot-boards, promptly to trip over the signal wires. Many were the barked shins and bruised noses; loud the curses, but louder the laughter from those less hasty in their descent.

I will pass lightly over the settling of minor problems and disputes; the inspections; the shameful, and shameless, manner in which my adjutant and orderly officer won tins of cigarettes from me at a card game, and finally, the sleepy subalterns who preferred bed to breakfast.

We came to Rawalpindi in the late afternoon, and here much of the train broke away, but that portion which was to go on to Peshawar was not due to do so until very late that night, and so many of us had several hours to wile away. My adjutant and orderly officer both stated that they were coming with me on a visit to the club, a spot I had not visited for many years, and it was suggested that we took some form of conveyance from the station. I, however, stated that the distance was not great, and that a walk would do us good. We walked. We walked, and walked, and the further we went the ruder, and more personal, became my companions. I, having quite forgotten what a large and straggling cantonment Rawalpindi was, assured them that the club would most certainly appear at each corner. By the time we found it, it seemed as if we had walked several miles, although in actual fact it is only just over a mile from the station.

The club is an excellent one, and in recent years has been much improved, there being now an exotic cocktail bar and other such modern luxuries. After a long drink in the bar I sought out a bath, much needed, and still more appreciated. From thence onwards the evening became a hectic one, for we ran into men not seen for years, and our surprise and pleasure had to be celebrated in drink, which flowed fast, too fast for me.

My adjutant and I returned by car to where our coach was awaiting us on the platform, and we retired to bed. Two hours later, and just before the train was due to start, I awoke with a raging thirst and there was, of course, no drinking water available. Liquid of some kind had to be found, and at once, and so I was forced to descend from the carriage clad in a pair of chaste, although bright blue, pyjamas, and buy oranges from a



station vendor. We both found that fruit entirely satisfactory.

(II)

It was a cold, misty-blue morning, and nearly 8 o'clock when we slowly pulled into a siding at Peshawar where, after shedding on to the railway staff the last of the train, I turned to find that there was no one to meet me. A gunner officer from another brigade, however, did take me under his wing and carry me off in his car to the mess. It is horribly depressing to arrive very early, or very late, in a new station, in a strange country, and to have no one to whom you can turn for information or assistance: a smile of welcome at such a time is very comforting.

In the mess I learned that the battery which I was to take over was away in camp, many miles distant, and that it would not be returning for several days. After a cup of tea I was led to my bungalow, which lay some distance away behind the mess, and was surrounded on three sides by a large garden which formed a corner for two side roads. It was of the old-fashioned type, with thick walls, but was in a poor state of repair and it was to be shared with another officer, he taking one half, and I the other.

A veranda ran the whole length of the bungalow and it faced the lawn, and from off it various doors led to the rooms. A door, with a very primitive form of wooden catch, was flung open and I was invited to enter the abode which was to house me for some weeks. Crossing the threshold we entered a large, bare, quite unlovely room with lofty, white-washed walls, and a curious fireplace which looked as if someone had given it a hard knock, causing it to slip sideways: it was an unusual

shape also, once having been almost round. Dotted about the room were an armchair of age, a low, round tea-table, a desk, and one chair. This meagre furnishing accentuated the general bareness, whilst on the cold stone floor was a much stained floor cloth, known as a dhurrie.

The air struck cold as a freshly opened tomb, and the atmosphere was as cheerful as that at a funeral. My guide, sensing my depression, apologised, saying that there were no better quarters available at that time. He left me.

A door on the left-hand side led to a dark bedroom, beyond which was the bathroom where there was the usual oval zinc bath-tub, a vile contraption into which



you can never get more than a small portion of your person, and when squatting in it in the cold weather you freeze above and scald below. The throne on which I was to meditate was typical of India, it being ludicrously small and uncomfortable, and the aperture was rough, and had not been rounded off. Its offspring was of enamel and now rarely seen other than in the East.

Returning to the living-room I stood about and waited for my bearer to arrive with the luggage and I thought of my flat in King Street and gulped. The bearer was so delayed that, as it was past nine o'clock, I decided to return to the mess in search of breakfast.

On the road the morning, although cold, showed signs of promise, when the rapidly vanishing mist was rose-coloured in the light of the low sun. A sweeper woman was flicking the dust off the road with a primitive hand-brush, but all she achieved was to surround herself with a cloud of dust; a bearer passed me riding a bicycle; a donkey, heavily laden with long strips of sugar-cane, was being shooed along by a small boy wearing nothing in particular, and a syce, riding a fresh young mare, trotted past on the tan which lined one side of the road.

Our mess was a new building of little charm, and the garden was just recovering from the desecration brought about by builders. Breakfast was not a cheerful meal where officers, young, and not so young, acknowledged my arrival without warmth and retired once again behind their newspapers. No one spoke, and depression, deeper than before, came upon me with the weak coffee (how I detest it), coarse fish, and curious butter, accompanied by soggy toast. But no, let us turn to more cheerful topics, for, like many another thing, it all turned out to be better than it first appeared.

Almost at once I was told that the colonel of the brigade was going out in his car to visit the infantry brigade camp where my new battery, together with others, was being exercised. I was to go with him to meet the battery, and also because some special form of Mountain Warfare was to be practised.

A few words on Mountain Warfare at this point will not be out of place, for what happens is not generally known, except in vague terms. As its name implies it is used among the barren hills of the North-West Frontier, where movement is only possible along the valleys, and in the gorges. When troops move from place to place they are forced to do so in long columns, which stretch for miles, should they be large ones. Everything has to be carried, and when moving off the few roads which do exist, mule and camel transport is used. When it is considered that, quite apart from the troops themselves, food for men and animals, tents, stores, and ammunition, as well as water and wounded, all have to be loaded on to mules, or camels, the columns lengthen out to an alarming extent, and nothing is quite so vulnerable as a string of defenceless animals and their drivers.

When engaged in operations of this kind it is imperative that the hill-tops on either side of the valley, or *nullah*, are what is called 'picqueted.' This means that a certain proportion of the troops in the column are detailed to send small parties of men to capture and hold the hill-tops until the whole force has passed by. Failure to do this means that the wily enemy will suddenly appear over a hill, or on a crest, and descend upon the unprotected and strung-out column, with disastrous results. Picqueting may sound simple enough on paper, but in actual fact it is a very complicated business, needing

careful timing, and considerable powers of leadership on the part of junior officers and N.C.O.s.

It was 7.30 a.m. on a very cold morning when the colonel and I set out from Peshawar and drove down the Grand Trunk Road. Eleven miles out we turned on to a side road and moved towards a long line of dark green hills which cut the clear morning sky several miles away.

By the time we arrived at the camp the regiments were already moving out to take up their first positions and it was then I first saw my battery. It was marching along a semi-mountain road with the mules carrying their pieces of the gun, and the British gunners marching beside them.

On the far side of a deep *nullah* the colonel stopped his car, we got out and approached a group of officers, resplendent in red and gold, and I knew that we were among the Great. There were brigadiers, full colonels, and staff officers, and, lastly, but by no means least, the greatest of them all. He was a large man, very large, and he was pleased to be gracious when I was introduced.

Dismissed from the presence, I looked about at what was a remarkable piece of country where, incredibly broken, the gorges, *nullahs*, gullies, and water-courses, spread out in every direction among the steep foot-hills. In the background were the high, green hills, up which I fervently hoped I should not be asked to climb. The colonel, I knew full well, liked nothing better than pretending to be a mountain goat, and if he tried this to-day I should have to go with him; a gloomy thought.

From a nearby staff officer I learned the details of the plot (in the army it is called a scheme). A column, in supposedly hostile country, was to march up an

enclosed valley nearby, whilst two battalions were detailed to capture, and hold, the tops of the foot-hills on either side of it. When the column reached the head of the valley it was to be told that it was almost entirely surrounded by a perfectly dreadful enemy, and that the commander of the column must retreat and extract his force from the mess in which it found itself. He was not to be allowed to retire on the road up which he had come, but must slip over the hills to the left. As the column was a large one, consisting of several regiments, two mountain batteries, and all the administrative services, this sounded as if it had exciting possibilities and I did not envy the column commander his task.

What a hectic morning it turned out to be. The signal to start the exercise was given, and the column set off up the valley, whilst the battalions ran up the hills on either side, not unlike herds of hill sheep. The valley itself was by no means a level one, and heavily laden soldiers, both British and Indian, officers, gun mules, horses, and the staff, tore up and down impossible slopes ; flags wagged, signalling lamps flickered, guns boomed (firing blank ammunition), and the enemy sniped from the slopes towards the far end of the valley.

I followed the concourse on foot, as did the colonel, and the farther we went up the valley the hotter it became. Just in front of us was the large general, whose horse, whenever he halted, sagged somewhat in the middle, as if its vast load was too much to be borne. Later, this general dismounted, and I became filled with admiration, for he toiled up the slopes with the best of the force. Towards the middle of the morning I, having lived a life of ease for so long, became exhausted. Tactfully I lost my colonel, borrowed a horse, and rode it. Besides, I was wearing heavy field boots in which you are not

meant to climb hills; when doing so they can grip the calves of your legs like vices.

During the early part of the march the column commander, being eager and thrusting, allowed the head of his force to get in front of the troops on the hill-tops. The watching staff viewed this with frowns, and grave nodding of heads; they also said what they thought would have happened in real war.

I came upon the commander at the head of the column, which eventually came to rest on the lip of a particularly nasty cliff, at the bottom of which was another broken piece of country, and saw he was hot, out of breath, and lying on his stomach on some extremely sharp pieces of shale. He reviewed the situation and gave out orders. Desperately he gave them out, and to all and sundry. Troops were flung out here, drawn in there, tossed to mountain tops, and sunk into valleys, and curiously enough they went there, and in record time.

I was not present when the harassed commander was told that he was almost surrounded by the horrific enemy, but I did see the retreat. I was sitting on a rock on a narrow saddle between two high hills, where a path led up to cross the saddle and drop down on the far side in a series of accentuated curves. Up the path toiled an astonishing assortment of troops. Hot, tanned Scotsmen, several different kinds of Indian troops, a whole mountain battery, ambulance men, pack mules, and local vendors of boiled eggs and oranges. All passed me by, and many gave a cheerful grin as they started on the downward path.

It was here that the colonel found me, and offered a bottle of beer, one of several produced by an orderly who appeared from behind a rock. That beer was good, as were the sandwiches that went with it, but when it was



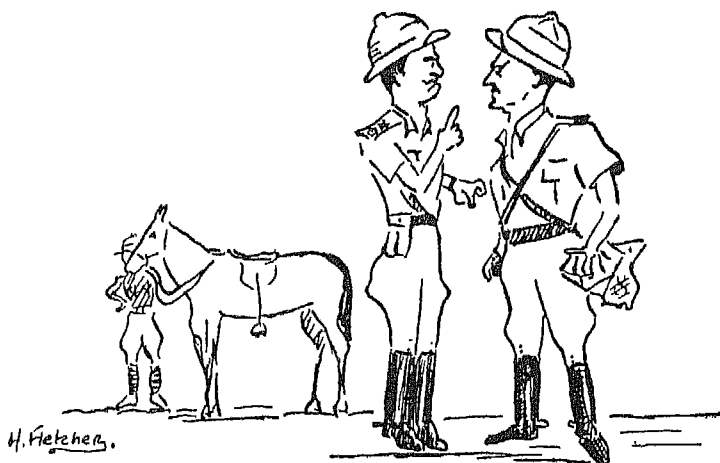
IN PISHAWAR CITY  
*(Top)* The Fruit Market  
*(Bottom)* Inside the main gate





finished the colonel said that we must go down and see what was happening to the mountain batteries, which were supporting the retreat by being prepared to shell any of the enemy who came too close. We descended and found one battery, but the other had vanished, and no one knew where it was. The colonel, from being surprised, became annoyed, and then furiously angry.

We searched frantically for it, fortunately on horse-back. We cantered across stony *nullabs*, broken ground,



and stretches of soft sand. At last, around the bend in a wide *nullab*, we came upon that missing battery. The colonel and the battery commander, out of hearing from the battery itself, had words, wicked, heated words. I stood by and felt sorry for the major who, gallant fellow, had gone off to take on some of the wily enemy who had stolen around the hills in rear. The trouble was that the battery was all alone with no infantry to protect it, which can be compared to facing a ferocious animal with a rifle and only one round of ammunition.

Leaving a quite unrepentant battery commander

behind, the colonel and I rode away to our waiting car, some miles distant. The colonel rumbled to himself, and I silently decided that if Mountain Warfare was really like what I had seen that day the less I had to do with it the better it would be for me.

(III)

Peshawar fascinates visitors because it lies on the fringe of exciting things. Situated in the middle of a large and fertile plain it is ringed by high, barren, brown hills in which live the bad men of our childhood days ; men who will pounce on you in the dark and do most horrid things. As a result the whole of the cantonment area is encircled by a heavy barbed-wire entanglement, the gates of which are closed at dusk, and the inner side of the wire is patrolled by soldiers all through the night. No one, not even the highest, is allowed outside the wire after dark.

Twelve miles from the entrance to the Khyber Pass the cantonment is quite separate from the city, which lies to the south. Peshawar sits across the great caravan route into India from the north, and it is one end of the Grand Trunk Road, which crosses northern India to Calcutta.

We took over the area from the Sikhs early in the last century, and to them it had been their frontier. They had been continually at war with the Afridis, who caused them as much trouble as they do to us to-day.

The whole cantonment area, apart from the bazaar, is, thanks to an abundant water supply, one large garden, and in spring, February, March, and April, it is lovely. The well-kept roads are hedged with roses, hibiscus, and flowering shrubs, and each bungalow has a large garden

with lawns, tall trees, and beds in which flowers grow in profusion. Nearly all the English flowers, that we exiles love so well, are to be found here. Sweet peas, violets, stocks, hollyhocks, cornflowers, pansies, snapdragons, and lilac, are but a few of them, whilst roses cascade in every direction.

To ride or play golf across the race-course on a fine sunny afternoon in March is to be in England on a warm May day, where there are wide stretches of bright green grass, groups of olive-green trees, and pale brown cows with huge, lustrous eyes grazing beside the course. Above is a deep cobalt sky in which chubby clouds float, and to the north is the magnificent line of the immortal snows rising high above the lower mountains. In the pellucid air the white, dazzling peaks look near at hand, although they are hundreds of miles distant. The atmosphere is balmy, and yet invigorating, and the horse between your knees quivers with the desire to canter over the resilient turf.

The Mall, which is always the main road, even in the smallest cantonments, is several miles in length. At one end, that nearest the city, is Government House, a fine, imposing pile, surrounded by spacious grounds and lawns. At the other end are the *bhoosa* stacks, and in between these two points are many things; the bungalows of senior officers, officers' messes, a masonic lodge, barracks, a few shops, including a bank; and last, but not least, the Club.

On the left-hand side of the roadway is a broad layer of tan, and on the other a footpath, which has a low, flowering hedge in lieu of a kerbstone. Beyond the footpath is a green space filled with rose trees and shrubs, beside which are the hedges of the bungalows, and the whole is lined with tall trees. At the various corners

traffic police stand on duty, and the traffic which uses this thoroughfare includes motor-cars, bicycles, *tongas*, horse-traps, riding horses, mules, and camels. That on the footpath is even more assorted, from *pardah* women in their long cloaks, to mem-sahibs exercising their dogs; and from soldiers to Pathans in gorgeous waistcoats and well-oiled and highly scented hair.

Towards the far end of the Mall, from Government House, and on the right-hand side of the road, is the Peshawar Club. It stands well back and is a low, straggling building, surrounded by tennis lawns, gardens, and various outbuildings; this famous club is, naturally, the social focal point.

In the outer hall, where the porter stands behind his counter, are displayed the notices of social activity; dances, entertainments, warnings of hunts, tournaments, and such-like things. On the counter are the files holding notices of articles for sale offered by those who are about to depart, and they cover many things, from horses and dogs to pianos and baby feeders.

Beyond the swing doors is a long, dark hall, off which several rooms open out. The first on the right is the lounge in which are easy chairs and small, round tables where in the winter evenings come the womenfolk to dance to a gramophone, talk to their friends, or look at the illustrated papers. Opening directly off this lounge is the spacious dance-hall, with its excellent floor and small stage.

On the left of the hall is first, the bar, and then the bridge and reading-rooms. In spite of remarks passed concerning my aptitude for writing about bars, I am going to do so again. Some of my critics do not appear to realize that club bars are now the last refuge for unmarried men, and those married who wish to get away

temporarily from their wives. It is true there are still left in London a few bars where women are not allowed, but these are low places of which I am sure my readers are not aware. The average man does not go to a bar to get drunk, or even to drink more than his normal allowance ; he does so to meet his friends, and to be able to talk without having continually to censor his conversation.

We will go into the bar of the Peshawar Club at seven in the evening on a night when it is fairly crowded. The room is an extensive one, and in it is the great, unusual horse-shoe bar, behind which are a number of Pathans serving those who line it. The men have gathered in small groups as they lean on the bar, or sit on the high stools ; before each is a *chota peg*.

To-night we are fortunate, for the gathering is varied. There are one or two fresh young subalterns just out from home, and at least two men whose voices carry weight in the halls of the great Indian Government. There are those down from the wild hills where they have been twisting the tails of the bad men ; judges grave, and judges gay ; secret service men, who do not look at all their calling ; soldiers of all ages and ranks, and, finally, stray visitors who have come up from down country armed with letters of introduction.

Over the drinks the conversation ebbs and flows when men talk of their work and express views which would horrify some of our smug politicians at home. To-night we can hear, if we wish, tales which would fill many books, but the trouble is that few would be believed. Let us move from group to group and listen to fragments of the talk.

Here is a tall, spare man with iron grey hair, and twinkling, kindly blue eyes. He is a major in an Indian

infantry regiment and is talking to a man in the Indian Civil Service, a brother officer, and the secretary of the club. He is discussing the activities of a certain subaltern.

"Silly ass he is. Puts on filthy rags, rubs dust in his hair and blackens his eyes until he thinks he looks like a Pathan beggar. Goes and sits in the bazaar and fondly believes they don't know who he is. They know all right, and think he's mad. You should hear Pir Khan on the subject. Made me laugh in spite of myself, he did. They call him the sahib who eats dirt because he likes it."

Moving on we come to a man in the Indian Civil Service, on the political side, who is telling an infantry colonel how he had recently conducted the Prime Minister of Afghanistan through the Khyber Pass. He tells, in a low voice, what the old man said, and what his views on Europe were.

Here is an artillery subaltern, in the early twenties, who is just down from Waziristan, and he is telling a judge and another subaltern a ghastly tale of how he saw recently the two headless bodies of brother officers whom he knew, and liked, brought in after they had been dealt with by the tribesmen.

"We couldn't find one of the heads, you know," he says. "Beastly it was. The trouble we had getting the poor fellows into camp. You know what it is on column?" His listeners nod. "We carried 'em on stretchers. Every time I passed 'em I shuddered."

We pass on to where one man is advising another to take a certain patent medicine.

"My dear fellow, it makes weak men strong and strong men frantic. You ought to try it. Really you should."

Here are two subalterns exchanging stories.

“ Have you heard the one about the young man from Ahmednagar ? ”

But no : it is best that we break off at this point.

The bar, however, is not always so full or so interesting, although it is generally possible to meet one or two amusing souls in this place. The second evening after my arrival in Peshawar, no one having taken the slightest interest in me, a newcomer, and hating my cowshed of a bungalow, I went off to the club and the bar. It was empty when I arrived and so, leaning on the bar, I ordered a chota peg and glanced at the many books of sweepstake tickets which were lying there. After a few moments a stranger came in whom I greeted and asked to drink with me. He accepted and we talked. A friendly person, he turned out to be the political officer for that part of the world and his work lay in soothing, guiding, and sometimes chiding the Afridi tribes who live in, and near, the Khyber Pass. I soon realized that it needed a man of no mean ability to hold down such a job successfully.

On learning of my condition he sympathized and asked me to dinner at his house. My heart warmed to him, for here was the first friendly act I had received in forty-eight hours. Two days later I went. His house was charming, and even more so was his wife. Intelligent and kindly, they were a man and woman of the world, and in their company London did not seem so far away.

Before leaving Peshawar I attended a memorable dinner party at the house of this political officer, where at the long dinner table there were unusual people. Opposite to me was the beautiful wife of a foreign minister in Kabul, and on my right was the Consul of Kashgar, that town buried so deeply in the heart of Asia. Further down the table was an elegant young Etonian



who was touring the East and was said to play the piano with great skill; a colonel commanding a British battalion, his wife, and also a general, he of the bulk who had run so nimbly up and down the hills.

After dinner we were shown into the white room where we draped ourselves in various positions, whilst the Etonian played to us. He played wonderfully, too wonderfully for me, to whom advanced classical music is a closed book. When I asked for 'Autumn' or the 'Liebestraum' he replied that he did not know them and I retired, crushed.

During the recital I leaned against a fireplace, whilst the colonel stood beside me and whispered stories into my ears which will not bear repeating. The general was a wondrous sight, for he had seated himself in a chair far too small for his bulk, and his hands were clasped across his ample middle. He was trying very hard to look soulful, but without any success: his face was not meant for expressions of this kind. Each time I glanced in his direction I was forced to grin, much to the mystification of those nearby.

To return once again to the club. During the warm weather, each Sunday morning from noon, people gather on the small lawn where they sit under sun-umbrellas to drink, and discuss the social doings of the past week. Later, much later, parties go off to the club dining-room for belated luncheons. The riotousness of these meals can be startling.

It may be of interest to note that an innovation has been introduced into the club. A Calling Club is run by the secretary, and newcomers who join the station club are invited to become members, and for the sum of one rupee the secretary will arrange for the new member to call on all, or named members, of the station club. This

means that the old tiresome business of running around and dropping cards into boxes hung outside the gates has almost been done away with. Nowadays, even in officers' messes, you write your name in a book instead of leaving cards.

## CHAPTER III

(I)

**T**HE wicked city of Peshawar lies at the northern end of the Grand Trunk Road and it is rightly said that there is more iniquity to the square yard in this city than any other, with perhaps the exception of Kabul. Someone once called it The City of Sudden Death.

In the narrow lanes and bazaars live a large proportion of the scum of the North-West Frontier Province, made up of horse thieves, robbers, murderers, swindlers, gangsters, outlaws, thugs, and procurers. It is interesting to note at this point that the WHOLE of the revenue collected from the province goes to pay the police force of the province, which is an astonishing thing.

Europeans are not supposed to walk in the streets of the city, and you enter the alleys at your own risk, which is no mean one. For example, a gold wrist-watch openly displayed is to invite a foot of cold, very cold, steel in your back, and when your body is eventually found, if it ever is, the murderer is on the other side of the border, richer by many rupees.

The city is surrounded by a comparatively low wall in which there are twenty-two gates, the most important being the Kabuli Gate, which faces the fort. The population is in the neighbourhood of 100,000, but curiously enough the trade of the place is not nearly as extensive as might be thought of a city astride the main caravan

route into India. Architecturally the city is void of interest, for the houses are built of mud and straw, which is supported by beams and rafters. It has often been destroyed by fire, and when it gets a hold it is only put out with great difficulty, the narrow streets making the use of modern appliances quite impossible.

Let us go on a visit to the place where, having often been on foot, we will do so again, in spite of the police regulations. Leaving Government House on our left we pass through the gate in the barbed wire and cross a railway bridge, from where we can hear the noise of the teeming city a few hundred yards away. On the far side of the bridge the road leads steeply downwards and then turns sharply left.

At this point, sitting or squatting against the rails, are the beggars, for it is along this road that the affluent *babus*, who work in cantonments, pass in the morning and return in the evening. There are not a great number of these beggars, but what is lacking in quantity is certainly made up in frightfulness, for the horror and wretchedness of this community is beyond belief, and they are of both sexes.

One, a man who is semi-naked, lies on his side with his face actually half-buried in the thick dust of the roadside and he utters sounds which imply that he is about to expire in agony. Another, clad in an assortment of rags indescribable, has a mop of filthy black hair; his face is dark mahogany in colour and is so deeply lined that the features are hardly distinguishable. He mouths at us as we pass. Here is an aged woman, a shapeless bundle of cotton rags, who squats with her back to the railings. She is so small, thin, and ancient, as to look like a child and she tells us in a weak, reed-like voice, that she is hungry. Then there is the tall sackful of sin, filthy

beyond all belief, who leans on a staff and regards us with lustful, insolent eyes : a devil, if there ever was one.

Leaving the bridge road we come to where the *tongas* are congregated, lining both sides of the road, and where thin, shamefully neglected horses are being fed with grass, or are standing with lowered heads, weary and miserable. Their owners wash down the vehicles with water from a roadside pool, or they stand and gossip at the top of their voices. I once knew of an officer who sold one of his unwanted horses to a *tonga* driver and when this became known the horrified cantonment nearly made him resign his commission. What the general said to him will never be known, but we guessed.

The Kabuli Gate, seen from the outside, appears to be an ordinary, although large, one, but on the far side blue tiles make a pleasing form of decoration. Just inside, on the left-hand side, is one of the many city police stations where the red-turbaned policeman on duty stands and surveys His Britannic Majesty's none too loyal subjects.

A wide street strikes ahead towards the centre of the city, but it is without interest, as far as the shops are concerned, for here live the more prosperous dealers, who sell European and Japanese goods. But the crowds who throng the pavements are quite another matter, and here, in mass, can be seen types which are unique, this being a Mohammedan city, whose inhabitants are nearly all Pathans.

There are many country folk present, having come in for the day, and they behave almost as do those in a similar position in England, as they saunter in twos and threes, friends holding hands as they look into the shops, gossip, or jostle each other. We are regarded with frankly curious eyes, and comments are passed as some

article of our clothing catches their eye. There are men here who have no morals as we understand them ; men who will rob, murder, and plunder at the first opportunity, and for small gain. It is given to few of us to be able to rub shoulders, and pass the time of day with cold-blooded murderers, and it can be quite exciting to those who allow their imaginations to play upon this subject. They are, in many instances, tall, of pale complexion, good looking, and hard bitten ; some have blue or grey eyes and tiny black moustaches, the Pathan being a very vain person. Many are desperately poor, and this is shown by their clothes which are all much alike. A pair of loose cotton pyjamas is caught up in the middle, and over these is draped an ample length of cotton cloth which is used in the manner of Highlanders, in that it acts as an upper covering, as well as a shawl, one end of which is thrown over the left shoulder. The colour of the cotton is invariably Isabella, which comes, not so much from dirt, as from long use and bad washing. The head-gear consists of a length of cotton cloth, often black, loosely twisted and tied round the head in a slovenly and thoroughly untidy manner.

Now and again, however, we pass a young, well-to-do Pathan dressed in all his finery, and a gorgeous sight he is with gaudy, much-embroidered waistcoat and soft, white, baggy trousers ending in fine shoes whose tips are arrogantly curled. His hair is smoothed, well oiled, and scented, and the *kullab* around which his turban is rolled is covered with gold thread. He swaggers along hoping that his acquaintances will see and admire ; there are, of course, no young women abroad at whom to throw amorous glances.

Moving up the street, avoiding, as far as possible, the filthy holy men and beggars, none of whom look as if

they ever had a bath, or combed their matted hair, we come to where an aged man is selling second-hand clothes. The goods are spread out on the kerbstone whilst he, himself, stands in the gutter. Gravely inspecting a garment of unguessable age, which they have picked up, are four young Pathans. They turn over what we now see is a waistcoat, and they discuss its possibilities among themselves whilst the seller of clothes looks on and says nothing.

One of the men, a particularly good-looking young devil, glances up, sees us watching, and says something to his companions and they mutter to each other. Whatever they are saying it is without doubt uncomplimentary. We grin faintly, and after a moment one of the Pathans shows a flash of white teeth in return. He holds up the garment, and says something in Pushtu. We grin once again, shake our heads, and pass on.

The street turns sharply left and we enter the real city where there are no pavements, and the tiny shops abut directly on to the roadway. On the left is the brass and copper bazaar where drinking vessels, coffee-pots, bowls, trays, and a number of other articles hang from pegs, or poles. From the dim interiors of the shops comes the sound of hammers beating soft metals, and peering inside we see men sitting cross-legged over tiny fires, surrounded by the tools of their trade. No one takes the slightest interest in our presence.

A narrow alley opens out between two of these brass shops, and a notice says that it leads to a pottery factory. We turn down it, avoiding a deep drain which runs beside the flagstones, and pass between tall mud walls which hide secrets at which we can never guess. Another, and even narrower alley branches off to the right and there we see another notice of the factory. A

low doorway leads to a dark passage, which in turn opens out into a large and covered courtyard in which is stacked a large variety of rather crude pottery in various shades of green and blue, but the glaze and patina is of poor workmanship, although the shapes of the bowls, and flower vases, and their colour, are not unpleasing. A small man, with a goat-like beard and a pock-marked face, comes forward and we ask him the price of his wares, and because they are absurdly cheap we buy one or two pieces.

In a nearby veranda, sitting in a pit in the twilight, is a man working a primitive potter's wheel. For our benefit he picks up a lump of damp clay and in a few moments the earth, under his expert thumbs, is rising and falling, swelling and shrinking, as if it had life. One instant it is a tubby bowl, the next a slim, graceful vase, and it sinks to become a low, open, and shallow dish whose edges are skilfully indented. The worker is a glum person for whom life has apparently lost its savour. Undernourished and poorly clad he sits in that pit and works long hours each day for a few annas.

We know that the owner of the factory is a bad man, a very bad one, on whom the police look with black disfavour, but as long as he does not openly preach sedition he is left in peace.

Once again out in the main bazaar, the strong sunlight hurts the eyes as we pass more deeply into the city. Here are the carpet shops, where piles of rugs will be unrolled for our inspection. They still smell of camel, and the acrid smoke of camp fires, for they have come down the long caravan roads from the far north. They are, however, of poor quality and hardly worth inspection. Then comes the shoe and sandal bazaar, where the footwear, from coarse cheap selections, range to displays of gaily



decorated samples, covered in gold and silver thread-work of pleasing designs, but the smell from the badly tanned leather is revolting.

A deep gateway on the left leads into the heart of the city, and through it passes a seething throng, made up of pedestrians, *tongas*, bullock wagons, camels, and bicycles. The gate opens directly on to a square, at the far end of which is a curious erection which looks like glorified bandstand; but it is neither beautiful nor interesting.

In this square are the money changers, who sit on their stalls and are surrounded by piles of small change. It is here that we become considerably embarrassed, for an idiot beggar has caught sight of us. He rushes up and dances fantastically in our path as he mouths at us, and utters strange and horrible cries. He is aged, hairy, filthy, and clad in rags which billow about him as he prances. Increasing our pace we try to avoid him. He leaps aside, and follows behind, but gradually we leave him, and his cries become swallowed up in the noise of the city.

At the base of the erection is a raised platform a few inches above the roadway, and standing on it is a crowd of solemn men. They face a tall, bearded personage of dignified bearing who, with hands folded on his chest, is chanting in a high-pitched voice, whilst at his feet is spread out what is obviously some form of patent medicine. We naturally imagine that he is extolling the strength and merit of his wares; but no, he is singing what is the equivalent to a hymn. This must be to put his potential customers in the right frame of mind, for, when we return some time later, he is squatting down and doing what appears to be a brisk trade.

Turning sharply left, behind the erection we enter

a narrow street, which is the gold and silversmith's bazaar, and the richest quarter in the city. Glass cases in the open-fronted shops display heavily embossed silver anklets, slim bracelets, and nose roses, which can be bought by the enthralled and extravagant lover to enrapture the heart of his beloved.

Two young men are sitting on the wooden ledge of a goldsmith's shop. Their heads close together, they are carefully examining a small heart made of the thinnest gold, in which have been set three stones, one of which is a ruby. They turn over the bauble in their thin, sensitive hands and are satisfied with it, for it is handed back to the paunchy smith who wraps it up in a piece of puce-coloured paper and the young men depart with the purchase, though as far as we can see no money has passed.

Each shop in this street has a massive safe and each has its own craftsmen who bend over tiny anvils beside which is a small charcoal fire, and they hammer out the silver bars, or fashion the thin sheets of gold. We halt before several shops and the smiths regard us with unsmiling eyes and expressions which are quite blank.

Farther up the street is a restaurant at which two youths of the better class are having a passing meal. They sit on a bench with their backs to the street and eat strangely. To one side, and near the front of the restaurant, is a very large, round bowl like a soup ladle without a handle. Set over a fire, fat boils furiously in it, and the man presiding over this cauldron picks up a small piece of pale yellow dough, flattens it between his palms and then drops it into the liquid. Fat is ladled over it and, most surprisingly, the dough swells into a round, airy balloon, the process taking only a few moments to carry out. The appetizing looking confection is lifted out of the fat and handed to one of the youths who at

once tears it apart, puts small pieces from a vegetable mess lying on a fragment of newspaper on to it, and then eats. His fingers are greasy and shine in the sunlight.

The street now becomes very narrow and the air heavy with dust, and there is that strange, mephitic atmosphere abroad which is found in all Indian cities. It is made up of a mixture of rancid butter, drains, unwashed clothes, hot bodies, and cow dung smoke (cow dung is dried in the sun, made into pancakes, and burnt as fuel), and through it, running like a streak, is the heavy perfume of eastern spices.

Someone in this street is having a marriage feast, because through an archway we can see a band performing outside a house. The noise, to our western ears, is an awful din, but doubtless an exquisite melody to those who are being entertained. It recalls the screaming of cats, the braying of asses, the bellowing of bulls, and, finally, the sounds from a small, energetic child let loose on a big drum, but I have forgotten the lunatic playing on a cornet which is out of tune. I have often wondered what a great soprano in full blast must sound like to eastern ears.

Returning to the square we pause before several china-eyed and vast water buffaloes who are lying in the road snatching a little rest, and they blow and snort as they catch a whiff from our tainted bodies. Their heavy, hairy, blue-skinned heads are raised, and they stare at something behind us. Perhaps, as Kipling suggested, they are watching the souls of the dead arise.

I mentioned our tainted bodies. To many Europeans the body odours of coloured peoples are most offensive, but on the other hand, we, to them, smell 'something awful.' This is undoubtedly true, for we are large eaters of meat, whereas the average coloured man is a vege-

tarian, not perhaps always from choice, but because he cannot afford to buy meat.

Crossing the square we come to the vegetable markets, an area packed with fruit of every variety, and most of the known vegetables, where there are split lotus roots and the common cabbage, walnuts and glossy nectarines. It is a pleasing and colourful sight, and it is here that we catch a fleeting glimpse of the questing housewife who, in her full-length *purdah* cloak, flits from stall to stall, timidly asking the price of this, or that.

Just ahead of us is a woman who is standing between two lines of piled-up fruit stalls, and beside her is her tiny son. He is two feet high and wearing a gorgeous, and much-embroidered, red velvet cap, and is dressed like the miniature man he is. His mother is about to buy some water melon, and not six inches from his nose is a pile of apricots. He ardently desires one of the tempting fruit, and his mother and the seller of fruit are busy. A tiny, fat hand takes an apricot, but the vendor has seen the act and he bends down and puts it back on the pile.

"Oh, thief. Oh, robber of the poor," he says. "Thy end will be a bad one. Surely wilt thou hang by the neck."

The son listens with horror stamped on his little face. He clings to his mother's robe, his face wrinkles up, and in a moment there will be a roar of lamentation. The seller of fruit, however, has a kind heart, and his bark means little. He selects a large apricot and gives it to the child. The storm has been averted, and the boy stares up with round black eyes as he sinks his teeth into the gift.

Beyond the market are the makers of *charpoys* (beds) whose legs in some cases are weirdly and wonderfully painted. There are also the fashioners of agricultural

implements, and those who cut up old motor tyres from whose pieces are made excellent sandals. Everywhere are the sellers of sugar-cane squatting in the roadway where the cane is stripped and then cut with nippers into pieces about an inch long. These are chewed and several bits can be bought for a pice.

The road widens into a street as it gently rises to where, at the top of the crest, is the massive gateway of what was once a Buddhist monastery, but is now the police headquarters and barracks. Climbing to the high roof of the gateway a splendid view of the city lies spread out below, and from here can best be seen how fragile is this large city of mud bricks, and riot of wooden supports and beams, inflammable as tinder. Across the uneven roofs sits the fort, squat, red, and an ever-present reminder to the turbulent citizen, that high spirits and evil-mindedness must be kept within bounds.

Well to the left are the distant trees of cantonments, and beyond the ever-encircling hills. To-day the air is cool and invigorating, but, in a few months time, the heat below will become infernal, and all who can will take to the house-tops at night and there gasp out uneasy hours of sleep.

Who would think, when looking down upon the busy, peaceful street at our feet, that this city hides more troublesome possibilities than our minds can guess at. When the frontier blazes up again, as it surely will, these streets will run with blood, and the souls of the faithful will rise screaming to their Nirvana.

(II)

I was sitting on the veranda of my bungalow in a long cane chair when it happened. Beside me was a *chota peg*,

it was just before nightfall, and I was feeling pleasantly tired after a long, slow canter on the race-course, and I hoped that someone would call in for a drink, and a chat.

No one did so, and the night closed down. Rugbar came out with an electric table lamp and set it down on the side table.

"Sahib, the bath awaits," he reminded me, and departed.

I nodded, but did not stir because a few more minutes' day-dreaming would not matter. It was now almost dark, and the mynah birds in a nearby tree were telling each other the events of an exciting day as they settled down to sleep. They all spoke together, and no one listened.

Suddenly I became aware that I was not alone, because a man stood before me on the edge of the grass and he had appeared as softly and swiftly as the night had done. His face was in the deep shadow, but I could see that he was tall, and thin, and dressed in old, dusty clothes.

"Alms, sahib. For the love of Allah, alms," he said in Hindustani.

Bending forward in my chair I beckoned him to come closer. He obediently advanced a few paces and crouched down on his haunches, not with a beggar's fawning, but with a natural dignity of his race. Beneath the untidily wound pugaree his dark eyes looked up at me with the pleading of a dog and I saw then that he was a Punjabi of the peasant class. His beard was grey and straggling, and his face deeply lined. This was strange, for he was certainly not an old man, or even a middle-aged one. He read my thoughts.

"Aye, sahib. I am not an old man, and yet I am with an old man's face. Those who have been to the gates of

Hell look as I do." His eyes were fixed on my own and I knew he spoke the truth.

"Alms. Whatever ye shall give in alms, as seeking the face of Allah, shall be doubled to you."

"Why do you beg from me?" I enquired, puzzled. "You are one who is strong and full of vigour. Where is your plot of land, your village, your wife? You are not a beggar. And why are you in Peshawar?"

The man nodded his head.

"The sahib is full of understanding, and what he says is true. Once I had a wife and a son; land and an honourable name, but in one short hour they were as if they had never been. The brightly burning flame of my life burned out, leaving only ashes."

I nodded encouragement.

"The sahib is interested? He is compassionate? Would he hear my story. It is a sad one. To tell it again lifts a little the burden from my heart."

"Tell it to me and I will judge," I said. "You have been in gaol?"

"Ay, sahib. Sixteen years. It is a lifetime to a young man."

I shifted in the chair and drank from my glass.

"Here, then, is my story. Once I owned land; good, fertile land which produced fine cotton, and men worked for me." He mentioned a village in a district which was vaguely familiar to me. "My father was a *tehsildar*, and our family a large one and held in much respect. We all lived in the village, and when the commissioner sahib passed he shook us by the hand.

"Ameera was my wife. A pearl, a jewel, a gem among wives. Beautiful as a rosy dawn, we loved each other and there was only one thing lacking in our household: I had no child, no son. For three years,

each day, I called on Allah the Compassionate and between the third and fourth years He heard my prayers and a son was born to us.

"Never was there such a son. From birth I knew he would swing the clubs, and be a great fighter. Between us we called him Buta."

The man broke off and looked at something behind me and I realized that Rugbar was standing behind my chair. I turned my head.

"The bath still waits, sahib," he said, and I knew from his tone that he heartily disapproved of my talking to a beggar. "The sahib remembers that he is dining with Smith Sahib? The hour grows late."

"Go to Hell," I said. "I will come when I am ready." I waved him away.

The man before me took up his tale.

"Perhaps the sahib has known the joy of a first-born son? The grip of the tiny fingers which hold the heart in their grasp."

I said I had not, but that I thought I understood. He shook his head.

"Nay, sahib. No one can know, who has not held his own son. For two more years my wife and I were happy : too happy, for the gods looked down and were jealous. When the day's work in the fields was over, Ameera, Buta, and I would sit in the courtyard under the stars where we dreamed dreams. What dreams they were. Buta would bring honour and fame to the village and I, in my old age, would be eaten up with pride.

"Then I made a journey to the city. I bargained with the dealers and sold my cotton crop for seven hundred rupees. Indeed a good price, and I rejoiced for they were hard men and I had showed myself the better.

"On the return journey I sang and praised Allah,



thinking not at all of the future, but that I would buy fine clothes, and silver ornaments for Ameera, and an embroidered cap in silver and gold for my son. No shadow of evil clouded my sight. But the gods were watching and gave me no warning. Why is it, sahib, that there is never a little sign? One little sign and it would never have been." The man's voice rose almost to a wail.

"It was nearly dark when I returned to our village and the parrots were flying overhead, and the scent of smoke from the cooking fires was in the air. My wife and son awaited me. In the house Ameera was busy over the fire, preparing the evening meal. When I told her of my good fortune she rejoiced with me, and asked for the notes so that she might count them. I gave them to her, and she sat down on the bed near the fire and I stood and watched her count the fat bundle.

"It was at that time the wife of a neighbour came into our courtyard. She who was for ever asking this, or that, of us. Devil's spawn that she was. This time it was oil, and Ameera, out of the compassion of her heart, put down the notes on the bed and pushed me aside so that she might get it. I, being covered with dust of the road, went out into the courtyard to wash at the well.

"Our neighbour's wife passed me as I was drawing water from the well and the *chatti* was nearly to the top when I heard Ameera make a great cry. Sahib, listen, and you will see how cunningly the gods sought my downfall.

"Buta had been near the bed and had seen the notes. Guided by some devil from Hell he moved across and caught them up in his tiny fists and he threw them on to the fire, as he had seen Ameera do with the charcoal.

"When I came into the house Ameera was bending over the fire striving to save the notes and Buta was

laughing at the flames dancing high from the burning paper. It was then something broke in my head, and a madness descended upon me. Remember sahib, a whole year's labour had vanished in a few flames. With a loud cry I pushed my wife aside and, bending down, caught up my laughing son and dashed him on to the fire. Buta, the joy of my life, the breath of my soul, lay face downwards and I also laughed to see the flames dance about his little head. My wife I held in my arms and she screamed, and beat my face.

"The madness then passed and I ran into the courtyard. The neighbours, hearing Ameera's cries, came, and and held, and bound me. My son died, and Ameera threw herself down the well, and also died. My father and my brothers cursed me, called me foul names, but I did not care for the life had gone from my bones and I was as a piece of dead wood.

"All through the hot day in the city they judged me in the court, and because I would not speak they said I was mad. Four moons ago they set me free. But where am I to go? What am I to do? I who am tired and cannot die. The sahib's heart is saddened by the story? Ay, it is a grievous one. What does the sahib say? He will take me into his household? I will take messages? Indeed the sahib is compassionate. But it cannot be. I am restless, and cannot stay in one place. I will wander until my times comes. But the sahib is my father and my mother. I will remember."

The man leaned forward and caught my shoes in his hands. I shook myself free, stood up, and went to my bath.

The essential truth of this story may be verified from the police records in the Punjab.

## (III)

In the Sadder Bazaar of Peshawar Cantonment there is a bicycle shop where I bought a machine for a goodly sum in rupees. It was a small, narrow shop, and it faced the very dusty main road on which every kind of traffic and pedestrian moved to and fro with the maximum of noise and agitation. On one side was another shop, which sold incredibly dusty gramophones, and on the other gaudy ties and sartorial wear were stocked.

In due course I returned to that bicycle shop and complained bitterly of this, and that : loose nuts and wobbly wheels being some of the ailments of the machine. My voice raised in protest and indignation, the machine being new when I bought it, was however interrupted by strange sounds coming from the street. Telling the greasy-haired young Hindu instantly to correct the faults, I went outside to see from what source such queer noises could be coming.

Standing below the three steps which led to the veranda in front of the tie shop, was a wandering minstrel of most unusual aspect. Under heavily-lidded eyes that minstrel gave me a look, and in it was a mixture of devilry, cunning, and a very great naughtiness. A tall, young, husky fellow, with a strong type of face, he was dressed in bright saffron coloured cloth which was gracefully draped about his person and also covered his head and it was almost clean, which is a wonder of wonders among such people. In his left hand he held a very long handled, single-stringed instrument, with a brightly polished copper sounding board, shaped like a bowl. In his right hand was a musical instrument which was new to me and it consisted of two separate pieces of wood of the same length, and on the inner

side of both pieces, and at the ends, there were brass castanets.

Clashing the pieces of wood together and twanging the single string the minstrel sang. He sang loudly, and from the back of his throat, his voice rising and falling in a not unmusical fashion.

The seller of ties, towards whom the selection was directed, appeared to be supremely indifferent to the entertainment. I asked him concerning the song, and he replied that it sang the praises of Allah. Turning suddenly to a boy beside him, the shopkeeper said something to him and he went into the shop. I watched the singer, who sang with a mighty religious fervour, but his eyes followed every movement of the boy in the shop. In due course he was presented with a small copper coin, valued about a tenth of a penny and this was placed in a bowl beneath the robes.

The minstrel showed no gratitude as he moved on to the fat seller of gramophones, who was seated in a carrying chair placed just out of the dust of the street. The fat one, if possible, showed more indifference than his neighbour had done. He looked at the animated street scene passing before his eyes, and he spat as only an Oriental can spit. The singer's well-fed, clean-cut features shone with his exertions, and it seemed to me that he was becoming a little hoarse. The fat man felt in his waistcoat, pulled out a copper coin, and presented it. The minstrel accepted it, gave me another nasty look, and passed on out of my sight, his voice fading pleasantly into the distance, to become lost in the medley of sounds.

The bicycle being ready it was now my turn to give someone a dirty look and I bestowed a choice one on the seller of bicycles before I also departed.

## (IV)

Between our mess on the Mall, and my bungalow in Fort Road, was a shrine, highly sanctified, and the resting-place of an unusually holy man. I passed it each day, but the keeper of the tomb never gave any sign that he was aware of my presence.

I never learned the name of the saint, but he was a great prophet, and must have known a thing or two because he is said to have stated that, although his bones would be put to rest in Peshawar, they would, one day, end up in the Khyber, twelve miles away. In actual fact the ground at this spot is moving northwards at the rate of an inch a year, and the cause is the numerous underground streams which abound here. The walls of nearby bungalows are continually cracking from this cause.

The tomb lies off the road under a cluster of flowering trees, and is surrounded by a low, oval, whitewashed wall. The grave itself is fifteen feet in length, with a twelve-inch kerb and a flat top, which is covered in water-washed pebbles. The foot rests against the base of a large tree, whilst the head is slightly raised. Behind the head is a small, dome-shaped shrine, with many shelves let into it and a few soft blue tiles adorn it, on which are written words in Persian.

A long, Isabella-coloured piece of cotton cloth is stretched over the top of the grave, and held down by pebbles. Fluttering from poles, pieces of wire, and the branches of the trees, are clusters of aged strips of cotton rags, some red, or blue, but mainly they are grey with grime. Two flags also fly from the tip of the highest tree, and they are green and stamped with the crescent and star of Islam.

The keeper of the tomb is an aged man who sits for long hours each day on the special platform on the right of the head of the tomb. Bony and hawk-like he squats immobile, or now and again he will get to his feet and talk to the pious who come to drop small handfuls of marigolds on to the tomb, or to place cigarette tins filled with bright flowers at the head. These pathetic offerings lie dead or dying for many days, whilst the wind stirs the rags above to flutter in sympathy with the fallen petals.

In the early morning a small boy, wearing a brown astrakhan fez, sits beside the aged man and reads aloud from a holy book which rests on the tomb. During the night, on special occasions, tiny, twinkling oil lamps appear on the shelves of the shrine, where they look for all the world like fireflies come to rest. Sometimes a real religious ceremony would be held at the tomb, when there would be much chanting and playing of stringed instruments, and dressing up with garlands of the visiting and revered mullah.

Beyond the walls of the tomb, and to the rear, was the mud house of the keeper. Here at all hours of the day there were a few visitors squatting on the raised platform outside the door where they smoked and gossiped, and I suspect were by no means as pious as they should have been. The aroma of sanctity, however, probably gave a spice to the conversation.

(v)

I would rather not write about the Khyber Pass ; so many others have done it, and far more ably than I can hope to do. However, to be in Peshawar and not visit this famous place is unthinkable, and so I will give a

purely personal account, avoiding description as far as possible.

It was a warm, rather sultry day when the car slid out of *cantonments* by a road close to the aerodrome. Under lines of green trees we passed the Indian college and ran on to the open, stony, and barren plain which ripples to the base of the foot-hills.

Crossing this plain I saw the ghosts of armies who have debouched from the pass on their way to loot, ravish, and despoil the rich plains of the Punjab. Doubtless they will do so again. Mostly I thought of Alexander, the greatest of all conquerors, who passed this way, where he left his mark, not only in stone, but in blood as well. There come the cavalry, the foot soldiers, the horses, camels, and the whole straggling army. Hour after hour it pours from the hills, and spreads across the plain like the water from a burst dam.

I catch a glimpse of that magnificent figure, surrounded by his friends and bodyguard. Little does Alexander know it, but every step he takes leads him nearer to his tragic death. It will be remembered that he died of malaria in Babylon on his return from India.

Fort Jumrud, seven miles from Peshawar on this road, sits across and effectively bars it. On one side of the barrier is British India and on the other Tribal Territory, where all who come down out of the dark hills must leave their rifles, feuds, and hates behind, before they may cross.

At the barrier the *habu* produced a book and demanded a toll of one rupee. I was not in uniform, but writing in the book a note of my whereabouts is recorded, for it is woe to him who is caught on this road at night without a full escort, and it can be compared to a zebra walking into a pride of lions.

The barrier was raised, the red-turbaned policeman saluted, and the car moved across into the wild lands, where might is right, and the timid lie with slit throats by the roadside. On the right sat the fort, red, squat, and menacing, whilst on the left was the large square khan for the use of travellers.

A mile or so farther on the road, which had been rising steadily, bit into the hills and the Khyber Pass began. By steep gradients, and accentuated curves, the narrow road rose up through a valley seared with water-courses which drained the tortured hill-sides. The ancient path is now used by the camel caravans, for these are not permitted on the new motor road. Up and up we climbed, and the railway followed us, until at last, around a very sharp bend, we came upon Fort Shaghai, situated under the shadow of a tremendous hill-side. This fort is the most important of the many in the pass; and it is a fine, large, new one, with water laid on, electric light, and other luxuries.

A Gurkha regiment was stationed in this fort and so I went in to call upon their officers. In the mess, over the gins and beers which always go hand in hand with visiting cards, I learned that they liked living in this place, although they objected to the violent wind which generally blew for weeks and even months at a time. In winter it was bitterly cold, and in summer a blast from a furnace.

I was taken out on to a wide parapet and shown the country-side where, directly below, were a few playing-fields, and beyond them small patches of green corn belonging to the village in the valley where no one was permitted to venture. The land rolled away to a long line of olive-green hills, and on them I was shown three of the picquets which had recently caused so much trouble

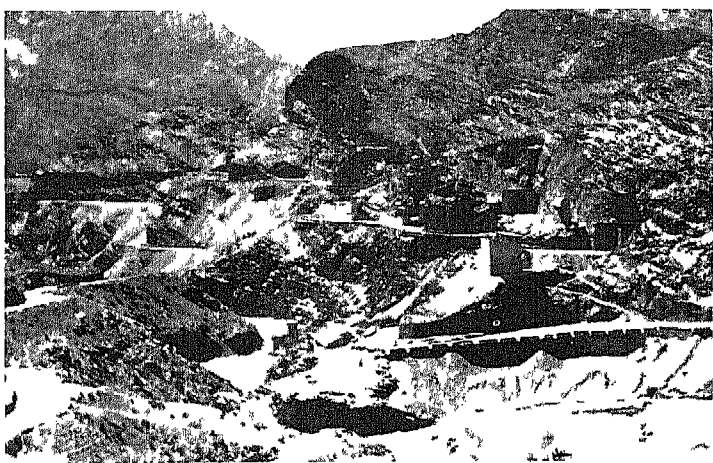


in this part of the world. They all but caused another Afridi war, and this is the story, and it well illustrates the trials and troubles which are the daily lot of the political officers responsible for order among the tribesmen.

The trouble began in this manner. The Government started the construction of a new road which was to run out from Ali Musjid (farther up the pass) towards Tauda Mela in the Tirah. This is Afridi country and the Afridis are Pathans, and road building in Tribal Country, wherever it may be, is looked upon with the deepest suspicion by the tribes, and they resent it because roads open up a country which is the last thing they want. The Afridis so strongly objected to this new road that its construction was held up, but after prolonged and delicate negotiations, an agreement was reached. In the meantime the Afridis built several picquets on the hills which overlooked the site of this road, and what was far worse, looked down upon Fort Shaghai. This, to the Government, was the equivalent of a direct and defiant insult.

Infinitely patient, and always with an eye on the budget, the Government told the tribes to remove these picquets. To this the Afridis replied that they would be damned if they would. "All right," replied the Government, "then you shall suffer until you see reason." The tribal money allowances were stopped; the flocks driven off the grazing grounds in British territory; and the tribal families, who come down to Peshawar for the winter, were sent back to the cold, bleak hills.

The older and wiser men now realized that they had gone far enough, and came to an agreement whereby the objectionable picquets would be broken up. This was brought about by the elders of the Zakka Khel (Khel is



# ON THE FRONTIER

*(Top)* The young idlers

*(Bottom)* The Khyber Pass



a collection of families inhabiting certain valleys). The settlement was, however, bitterly opposed by the younger men of other khels, and they set out and burnt the houses of those they considered were traitors. Their attitude was, that if the picquets were demolished, the road making would begin again.

When I saw those picquets the situation had taken an unusual turn. The Afridis had removed their men from them, but with humorous cunning they had turned the picquets into mosques by the simple process of erecting two pointed stones and a rough dome in each and whitewashing them. They were now holy ground, and woe betide us if we turned on a few mountain guns to blow them up ; a holy war would be preached. Islam was once again in danger, and the Indian Government would have yet another troublesome war on its hands.

The matter has now been settled, once and for all, and we shall not have to chastise these tribes ; but I am told, on good authority, that if we are not very careful there will be war in this part of the frontier. At the time of writing we are dealing with that sink of iniquity, the Fakir of Ipi, of whom more will be said.

The tale of the picquets has been baldly told, but those who know can read between the lines and see the interminable talks, persuasions, and threats, which the harassed political officers had to make before an agreement of any kind could be reached with the tribesmen.

Farther up the pass, where the hills really begin to close in, stands Fort Ali Musjid. It is perched high up on the crest of a great solitary mound of rock, where the Union Jack from its mast looks smaller than a postage stamp, so far away is it. On every side is the tangled earth, savage and morose in its distorted bareness, and the towering hills, so brown and boulder strewn, bear

witness to how once this area was wrenched, tortured, and convulsed. The road follows the torrent bed, winding and twisting, crossing and recrossing this grim gorge, which Kipling so aptly called 'That Sword Thrust in the North.'

On a hill-side, opposite to Ali Musjid, is the haunted blockhouse, grey against the ochre, where neither British nor Indian troops will stay for more than a few hours.

The story connected with this blockhouse is as follows. Just after the third Afghan War in 1919 a picquet of Indian troops consisting of one N.C.O. and six men was sent up to this blockhouse, which is known as Sam Brown's Picquet, after the famous general.

The following morning, as no signs of life were visible and all signals remained unanswered, a party was sent off from another post to find out what was the matter. Much difficulty was experienced in getting into the blockhouse because the door was many feet from the ground and the ladder had been drawn up. When the investigators forced their way in they found everyone dead, just as if they had fallen asleep, and with no marks of violence on their bodies.

Since that time neither Indian nor British troops will stay in the blockhouse, which is firmly believed to be haunted by the ghostly picquet. It is suggested that the deaths were caused by carbon-monoxide fumes from a charcoal fire.

The gorge is of no great length, the hills suddenly drawing back leaving a small, flat plain which is dotted with Afridi houses, each a tiny fortress, with its loop-holed watch-towers and high, blank walls. The ground is cultivated here, and the rising crops show a pleasant green in the brown and ochre. At the various water

points are gathered the women, black garbed and timid, and they gossip whilst their pitchers fill, as they have done all over the East for untold ages.

At the head of the plain I left the cantonment of Landi Kotal on the right and continued down the pass to where the hills closed in once again. It was now luncheon time, so I halted the car beside a culvert and got out. Below was a wide, deep valley full of shale and boulders, and on the far side ran the caravan route upon which were a few overladen donkeys being whacked on their unwilling ways by dark, hairy men in dirty clothes. A hill-side rose direct from the road, and above it the kites, ravens, and eagles, wheeled in the clear air as they made their shrill cries.

Up the road came a solitary Afridi; a young man who eyed me with diffidence, and sat himself down thirty yards away to wait, like a hungry dog, until I should have finished my luncheon. That my sandwiches, of which I should leave a few behind by the roadside for him to collect, contained the forbidden ham, would not matter; there would be no one to see, and all meat was good when you had so little of it.

I threw him an orange and he caught it like a good cricketer. I then went and talked to him, asking why he carried no rifle, and learned that this had been taken from him in the past by the Government, doubtless as a penalty for some act of devilry. He regretted its loss more than he would have done a son. A cheerful rogue, his manner was charmingly shy, and he wriggled his sandals in the dust as we conversed.

Continuing onwards, to what I hoped would be the actual frontier of Afghanistan, I unexpectedly came upon a barrier on which was a large notice which stated that visitors could go no farther without a pass from the

political officer in Peshawar. I had no pass. This was annoying, and I said so to the little wisp of a bespectacled *babu*, who appeared beside the car in support of the bewildered Indian policeman who was shocked by my flow of language.

"Oh, no, saar. You cannot go. The regulations say you must have the pass," said the *babu*, in what he hoped were soothing tones.

"But I have come all the way from Peshawar to see the frontier," I said angrily. "I am a major sahib, and a great friend of the political officer sahib. He will be very angry when he hears that you will not let me through. Doubtless he will have you beaten."

The *babu* looked worried, but remained firm.

"Is there a telephone here?" I asked, getting out of the car.

"Oh, yes, saar. There is one up there." He pointed to a square blockhouse, perched high above the road and the barrier which it guarded.

Thrusting aside the crowd which had collected I went up, and climbed into the blockhouse by way of an iron ladder which could be drawn upwards. I telephoned. I did so with no success, for the man I sought in Peshawar was neither in his office, nor his house. I shrugged my shoulders and admitted defeat, but I climbed, however, to the roof of the blockhouse from where there was a magnificent view down the pass into Afghanistan.

On the return journey I turned off the road to look at Landi Kotal, where a keen surprise awaited me. Here in the middle of the Khyber Pass, thousands of feet high, surrounded by the virile hills and even more sinful and immoral peoples, was a charming little cantonment which would have done credit to many a down-country station

Trees and flowers, gardens and tennis courts, good bungalows and playing-fields, all were there, as well as water laid on, and electric light, and it affected me rather as if I had come upon a large cinema set down alone on Salisbury Plain.

The cantonment contains one British and one Indian regiment, a mountain battery, and all the usual services. I called on the British regiment in their comfortable mess and was hospitably entertained.

By this time it was growing late and I had to pass the barrier at Jumrud by a certain hour. Back through the gorge, and past Fort Shaghai, the car arrived at the point where the traveller from the north gets his first view of the plains of India. I stopped the car and got out. The gap in the hills showed the vale and distant Peshawar as a greenish haze. Here Alexander must have stood, looked, and wondered. It would be interesting to know of what he thought.

Nearing Fort Jumrud I saw a large gathering of tribesmen surrounding the khan. There must have been a thousand of them, and all but the youngsters carried a rifle and well-filled cartridge-belt. This, I knew, was the prelude to an important *jirga*. A *jirga* is a *darbar* held by one, or more, political officers, when the wild men come down out of their hills to talk and see what they can get from, and how far they can go with, the Government. In twos and threes they come out of their valleys, cross the hills by the goat tracks, and gather at the meeting-place, sometimes days before the *jirga* is due to start. They sit on their haunches in large and small circles and they talk. These discussions go on for hours on end, and would drive the average European to the point of madness.

I got out of the car and walked among them, but my



driver was distinctly nervous, and not without cause, because it was indeed a horrific gathering of scallywags. Tall, thin, undernourished, they were dark, very hairy, with hooked noses, and most wicked eyes. They stood in groups, or squatted, and they regarded me rather as wolves would do if a lamb appeared in their midst. I got many evil looks, very dirty looks indeed, and I knew only too well what would have happened had any two met me alone on some hill-side. Those looks were thrown out sideways from half-closed, reddened eyes; but I knew, and they knew that I knew, that the little red fort just behind was watching, and they could only lick their lips.

On my return to Peshawar I found that I had collected something else besides dirty looks, because I was suddenly forced to seek a doorpost and rub my back with satisfying energy.

(VI)

The Pathan is an interesting person from many points of view, and the name is a generic term for the great block of tribes, or khels, who inhabit the valleys on the North-West Frontier. Their origin has been a subject of heated controversy, there being a wide-spread belief that they are of Hebraic extraction; in other words, one of the lost tribes of Israel. There is, however, no foundation whatsoever for this, and it probably arose from the fact that the race is faintly like the orthodox Jew, in that they have hooked noses, are hirsute, and somewhat biblical in behaviour.

Many of these tribes, especially in and around the great passes into India, are the remnants of great invasions, although the Zakka Khels seem to have lived in their wild hills since the dawn of history. The

generally accepted origin of the Pathan race is that they are descended from the Afghans of Ghor. The latter, in the time of Mahomet in A.D. 600, sent a deputation under a man called Kais to visit the Prophet at Medina. Here the deputation was converted to the new faith and Kais received the name Abd-ul-Rashid, together with the name Pathan, which means the Strong. It was he, on his return, who converted the Afghans, and the Pathans say that they are all descended from him or his family. Their language, Pushtu, certainly bears no resemblance to any known speech, although, of course, Persian and Hindustani words have been taken into use.

They are generally known to be a warlike race, but what is not so well known is that they are perpetually at war with each other, where every tribe has its internecine wars, every family its hereditary foes, and each individual his own blood feud. There is hardly a man among them who, during his 'teens, has not committed murder, and their women folk egg them on. There is, however, a basic reason behind this because living as they do, a hard, open-air life on the scratchings of a poor earth, life must be cheapened, or there would not be enough food to go round, and so it becomes a question of the survival of the fittest, and the most cunning.

Revenge, to them, is as love to other men, and the Pathan will go to what we should consider incredible lengths to remove the stain upon what he calls his honour. Whatever may be thought of their morals it cannot be denied that they are gallant, and most courageous, and admire these qualities in others. A stranger who enters their houses will be treated with much hospitality, but let him step a few yards outside and his late hosts may set out to collect their payment in kind, with thin daggers and seeking fingers.

They live in the long valleys near the pitifully small supplies of water, and they cultivate a poor soil. Their villages are collections of scattered houses built of mud and straw, and each is a little fort on its own in which the whole family and its beasts live. Their food in summer consists of wheat and barley cakes, a few vegetables and milk in various forms, but in winter maize is often substituted for wheat. They have two meals a day, one about ten in the morning and the other after sunset. Tea is drunk by all who can afford it, and they are fond of tobacco.

They enter military service, but do not easily take to discipline, and they have to be treated with considerable tact and humour. Pathan humour is crude, very crude indeed, but they laugh easily, and many a man has got himself out of a nasty situation by making a lewd joke at the right moment. I know an Englishman in India to-day, who, with a companion, was caught by tribesmen. They stood nearby where the two men lay bound on the ground, and discussed the most diverting manner in which to put them to death. My acquaintance then made a very, very rude jest, but his companion lay and protested, whereupon he had a dagger pushed through his ribs, whereas the other man made them laugh and eventually got away to tell me the tale. I wish I could give the jest, but there are limits beyond which I must not go.

There are two things a Pathan guards with his life : first and foremost is his rifle, and secondly his wife. An unfaithful wife is messily slain, usually by cutting off her head in the backyard, and the wronged husband sets out to kill the lover, or be slain himself. This does not fit in with his general sex outlook, which is curious, but then he is an odd creature. He has a saying : ‘ For

duty a wife ; for pleasure a boy ; and for undiluted bliss a goat, or an overripe melon ' ; (there appears to be some difference of opinion over the last). He carries this out in actual fact.

They belong to the Sunni sect of Mahomedans, and they ride their religion with a very light hand, except when a European is near at hand. They, of course, make it an excuse for all their numerous quarrels with the Government. Here is an example which has helped to cause the late trouble in Waziristan, where the Fakir of Ipi made the most of it.

A tribesman came down from Tribal Territory and seduced a Hindu girl from one of the towns on the Indus, and she eloped with him into the hills and became a Mahomedan. Her family said it was an outrage, and that if the Government did not get her back they would be accused of taking sides. The Government stirred and, in due course, the girl was torn from her lover's arms and returned to her family. She did not want to go back at all, finding her strong husband much more attractive than the weak-kneed men of her own town.

The matter was brought to court and the presiding magistrate, administering the law, said that she must remain with her family. At once the tribes rose up. Islam was once again in danger because a Mohamedan girl was forcibly being made to revert to Hinduism and the Government was considerably embarrassed by this delicate situation. I am not suggesting that this, alone, has been the cause of the warfare in Waziristan, but it certainly was a factor in the case, and a strong one.

The Mohmands are the most priest-ridden of all the Pathan tribes, and it was only a short time ago that many valuable lives were flung away in the nasty little war with them. These priests, or mullahs are fanatical, and are

always preaching a holy war against us. The wiser and older men know better than to listen to this evil talk, but not so the younger hotheads, who often carry the day with disastrous results to everyone concerned.

The Khyber Afridis number about 20,000 and the Zakka Khel is the largest and most turbulent among them, but their reputation is an evil one, even among their own people, and no one will accept their word without a substantial pledge. Their fondness for brigandage is a byword and they cultivate as little as possible, and scorn the grass and fuel trade with Peshawar, preferring to loot their neighbours and accept a bribe for good behaviour from the Government. Nearly all the trouble we have, and have had, with the Afridis can be traced to this tribe.

## CHAPTER IV

(1)

I FOUND the great, bare, central room of my bungalow too depressing, and so moved into a tiny side room which I was able to make comfortable. It looked directly out on to the lawn and garden, which was just about to burst into a profusion of spring flowers, where violets, large and delicately perfumed, sweet-scented stocks, pansies, and sweet peas were already in full bloom, whilst the hollyhocks, cornflowers, and sunflowers were swelling into buds of flowers.

Under the vast pipal tree would come the mynahs after a shower of rain, and walking about the grass with fussy importance they reminded me of shopwalkers, being so sleek, and well dressed, with never a feather out of place. On fine days, when I had my tea on the lawn, they would come and take biscuit crumbs with greedy snatchings. These birds make good pets, and will talk.

In the afternoons, soon after my return from luncheon in the mess, the veranda would be invaded by a succession of curious people. One wished to tell my fortune; another to make shoes; and a tall, and I suspected, insect-ridden person would lead me to where game, big and small, was to be found in abundance. I was offered charity sweepstake tickets by shy little girls, and a stray, greasy, young man, who was a failed B.A., wished to cut my corns; but on learning that I was not afflicted in this manner he sorrowfully faded away.

A small, dark, bearded man, with an ingratiating manner and a voice which sank to a confidential whisper, was a seller of carpets and his name was Nur Khan.

Carpets and rugs of all kinds have a great attraction for me and if I were wealthy I would have my floors strewn with rich, deep colours, which glow in certain lights like gems. The trouble of desiring such things is, that they are invariably beyond my means: one can, however, look and admire.

Nur Khan most urgently wished to show me his collection.

Nur Khan: "Sahib, I have some very fine rugs. Just let me show them to you."

Myself: "All right. I will look at them, but I cannot buy. Although a sahib, I am a poor man."

Nur Khan smiles disbelievingly, and calls up the coolies who spread the wares on my veranda. None of them have any merits in my eyes. They are dull, colourless, poor things, and a few are hideous.

Myself: "I think your rugs are horrible. I am surprised that you should think that I could be tempted by them. Go away. If you have anything worth looking at, bring them, but I will not buy.

Nur Khan: "Sahib." He lowers his voice to a whisper. "To-morrow I will bring some fine rugs. I see you are a good judge."

The following afternoon he reappears with a fresh consignment which is spread out as before. I admire several which are really good, but I know quite beyond my means. However, I pick upon three rugs which I like. I might get them cheaply.

Myself: "I like those two very much, and that one also. The others are lovely, but not for me. I can only

pay a small price. How much do you want for the three ? ”

I have made the first move in the game, and wonder how it is going to end. I want those rugs badly and bend down and examine them carefully, at the same time making up my mind the limit in price to which I will go. I fix on sixty rupees (four pounds ten shillings). Nur Khan is doing the same thing, but from another angle. I get up, light a cigarette, and wait to hear what I know is coming.

Nur Khan : “ Sahib, I will make you a special price. I wish you to buy something. To-day is a festival and we think it unlucky if one customer does not buy. (I know this move and smile.) You may have them for one hundred and twenty rupees. I shall lose on that, for it is a very special price.”

Promptly I show visible signs of acute emotion where pained surprise and indignation play their parts. I also make a move towards my room. “ What ? A hundred and twenty for those. You must be mad. I told you I was a poor man, not a rich tourist. I couldn’t dream of it, or anything like it. It is a pity because I like those three.”

Nur Khan now makes the next move in the game and he bends down and points out the design, the colour, and general desirableness of the wares. Standing up again he assures me he will starve if he lets them go more cheaply and I am told that nowhere in all Peshawar will I get rugs for so little money. I smile and make the counter-move to this. I feel the rugs once again, shrug my shoulders and go inside. Nur Khan instantly follows me. This is a good sign. The rugs are nearly mine.

Nur Khan : “ Sahib. What will you give me ? Just make one offer.”



Myself: "No. It is no good. Please go away. I want my afternoon's rest."

"Just make one offer, sahib."

"Well since you insist. I'll give you twenty each for the two, and ten for the third. That is all I can afford."

It is now Nur Khan's turn to show pained surprise. He does so and I grin. Lowering his voice he has followed me into my sitting-room, and becoming ludicrously confidential he offers the rugs to me for ninety rupees. I remain firm and tell him to go away and not be silly. I am, however, fully aware that the rugs are now mine. Nur Khan suddenly dashes outside, catches up one of the rugs, returns, and casts it on the floor and his eyes roll at the splendour, and silently I agree that it does look quite well. It is now time for me to make my final move.

"All right. Because I like them I will give you sixty. That is as far as I will go. Not one anna more."

Behaving as if he were selling his loved wife for a mess of pottage, Nur Khan accepts my offer. I give him a cheque and thanking me he asks if he may return tomorrow with some quite exceptional curios. This is bad, showing that I have not driven a very close bargain. But I do not care. They are worth sixty rupees to me, although the price should have been nearer fifty.

The seller of rugs departs and I arrange the rugs on the floor and am enchanted with the result. I am, however, human and know that the man who is sharing the other half of my bungalow recently bought some inferior rugs at a much higher cost. I go and ask him if he will look at mine. He comes along, admires them, and asks what I paid, and, on learning, he shows gratifying discomfiture.

## (II)

No sooner did I start to take over my battery than I came up against that menace, that snare and delusion, the *babu*. I had forgotten him, and his nasty ways, but he soon made his presence felt.

The *babu* is an English speaking clerk and invariably plump, he is ingratiating, and owns a devastatingly one-tracked mind. It is impossible to avoid him, and much of the army in India is run by him because he invades every department and turns what might be a human, understanding form of control into a strange, dead level tyranny.

He writes in pencil on a kind of paper that, in England, would be used for quite another purpose and the writing is difficult to read and when deciphered is so phrased as to be almost meaningless. Like many half-educated people he has a fondness for long words and heavy, complicated sentences.

Regulations are his bibles and their numbers must be legions. Regulations, however, are meant to be read, and interpreted in the spirit in which they were framed, and not taken as hard and quite inflexible orders. The *babu* cannot be made to see this.

"Oh, yes, saar. But you cannot do that, saar. The regulations say . . ." is his point of view, and he clings to it.

Raging denunciations, curses, or sweet words and reasonable, have no effect: the regulations say this, or that, and beyond you cannot go. He stands before your office table holding a book of regulations and a sheaf of papers, and he is a timid man. His manner is soft; but lucky, and clever, is he who can defeat him, and not become mentally and physically exhausted. You glower



at him, and he smiles nervously ; you rise to your feet to choke him and he scuttles away. When caught out he appeals to your sympathy for he is a poor, humble man with a wife, children, and a dying cousin, and you, the sahib, are his father and mother. Even should you be able to circumvent your own *babu*, there is sure to be one higher up who will not be so easily disposed of.

The worst of all the *babus* are to be found in what is known as the Corps of Military Accounts, where they can only be reached on paper. Should you make some quite fair claim, but one which is not legislated for in regulations, it will certainly be months, if not years, before you get your dues, and the amount of paper used will not be small. Correspondence can, and does go on for years, and the sums of money involved are often ridiculously small. It is a popular belief that the *babus* in this department get bonuses on every claim for pay, or allowances, that they manage to turn down : I do not know what truth lies behind this, but it is not beyond the bounds of

possibility. In many cases you are required to sign as having received your money before the claim is even passed for payment, this taking the form of 'I certify that I have received payment.' That, of course, is not only untrue, but a definitely military offence, but nothing, however, can be done about it.

Here is a case which illustrates the mind of the *babu* and it is not in any way exaggerated, rather the reverse.

The scene is laid in my office after the battery's return from active service in Waziristan. The Public Account (all official payments) shows a payment of five rupees (7/6) to a certain Sher Ali, for gallant preservation of Government stores. This item is seen by a junior *babu* in the office of the Controller of Military Accounts, and he gets his teeth into it. This takes the form of a letter which I find in a tray on my office table.

'Please say why Sher Ali was paid rupees five. It appears improper.'

I scent the coming battle and reply :

'On May 18 the battery was crossing the Munnzi Tangi (river bed). The river was in spate, the battery in a great hurry and the signalling mule was swept away. Sher Ali, a goatherd who was watching, jumped into the water, and, with great gallantry, caught the reins of the mule and dragged it to safety. The mule was carrying valuable signalling stores so I paid Sher Ali a reward of five rupees.'

*Letter No. 2.*

'Regulations do not allow payments to goatherds, please. Please refund rupees five. Please say what is spate.'

*My answer :*

‘ This is a special case. By the gallant action of Sher Ali valuable stores were saved from destruction. This payment should come under . . . (After frantic delvings I have found a paragraph in the regulations which is obviously meant to cover such cases).

Sbate means a rush of water. Just like when you pull the plug in a water closet.

*Letter No. 3 :*

‘ Please say why mule ran away.

‘ Why did driver not save ?

‘ Who caused rush of water ? ’

*My answer*

‘ The mule did not run away : it was swept away. The driver did not save the mule because he was a timid man. He feared for his life, having a wife, nine small children and two grandmothers, one very old. (The humour will be lost on the *babu*.)

I suppose Allah caused the rush of water, although some might say it was a thunder-storm.’

*Letter No. 4 :*

‘ Please say what stores were saved. Please in detail.’

My answer to this gives a list of twenty-eight different kinds of signalling stores carried in the leather panniers on the mule’s saddle.

*Letter No. 5 :*

‘ Please send receipt for rupees five paid to goatherd.’

*My answer :*

‘ I did not get a receipt. One because the goatherd could not write, and secondly, I had not an ink-pad with

me. (Thumb prints are accepted in lieu of writing in the case of illiterates.)

*Letter No. 6 :*

‘Please say why you had no ink pad. Receipt must be sent please.’

*My answer :*

‘I had no ink-pad because we were fighting a bloody battle against the bad men at the time. You know, those who live in Waziristan. You must accept my word that I did give it to him.’

*Letter No. 7 :*

‘Regulations say receipt for all payments made, please.’

I send a receipt signed by myself. There follows a long pause. One day, however, I get :

*Letter No. 8 :*

‘The C.M.A. (Controller of Military Accounts himself) says that regulation quoted does not apply. Please refund rupees five paid to goatherd.’

Grinding my teeth with rage I nearly give in and pay the money from my own pocket. I suspect, however, that this is just what the *babu* wishes me to do. I say to myself that I am damned if I will.

*My answer :*

‘I refuse to refund the money. I demand that this case is put up to the Government of India for a ruling.’

This is the last I hear and when a reply is received eighteen months later I shall be in England and my

successor will have to carry on the battle. He will probably have to refund that five rupees. Incidentally the cost in postage amounts to just under one rupee, not to mention paper and wasted time.

Here are two further examples of how *babu*-ridden is India.

A senior Royal Air Force Officer was in the habit of buying large quantities of stores for his squadron from local merchants. Two of these merchants, although of different names, were, in reality, the same firm. At the end of a month they sent in their bills. The officer paid them both with one cheque. He received the following letter from the office of the C.M.A.

"You have defrauded (note the word) the Inland Revenue of one anna receipt stamp by paying these bills with one cheque. An explanation is required."

The language used by this officer was weird and very wonderful.

There are certain areas in India from which officers may be given three months leave each year, instead of the usual two months. Quetta is one of these. A certain officer, who had become entitled to this three months, put in his application for leave and it was granted. Before going on leave he was sent down to Karachi to do a job of work and he wisely arranged that, when the job was finished, he would go straight on leave from that place, instead of trailing all the way back to Quetta. By so doing he would save the Government his fare back, and his own fare down again.

He, however, came up against a blank wall. The regulations said that he could only have two months from Karachi, and therefore he must start his leave from Quetta. He expostulated.

"I am only down here for a few days on a temporary

job. Surely you don't want me to go back to Quetta just to go on leave?"

"If you leave from here," was the answer, "you can only have two months."

Incredible as it may seem, that officer got into a train at Karachi, arrived in Quetta the next day, went to his office and reported, returned to the station and caught the evening train back to Karachi. He had complied with regulations and could now go on three months' leave.

That regulation cost the Government over a hundred rupees to send the officer back to Quetta, and cost the officer the same to return to the port from which he was sailing. No one, not even the army commander, who was appealed to, could change those regulations, or even modify them. The only person entitled to do so was the Secretary of State in London.

These things speak for themselves.

### (III)

There is no form of entertainment quite so deplorable as that known as Regimental Sports because their propensities for boring considerable gatherings of people are quite remarkable.

In Peshawar, at the time of which I am writing, there was a spate of sports (this alliteration is irresistible, besides spate is true and descriptive in this case). There were three lots of regimental sports taking place in one week and I was forced to attend each of them. It was with fury that I read the invitations printed on large cards and placed on the notice-board in the mess. The hours of boredom which I should have to endure appalled me, for, unlike other social events, you are unable to



move about and meet your friends, but remain fastened to a small, hard chair for hours on end.

The invitations take a common form.

Lieut. Colonel H. W. V. Gurgle, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C.,  
and

the Officers

14th Devonshire Regiment (The 299th Regiment)

request the pleasure of the

company of

The Officers Royal Artillery, Peshawar,

at their Regimental Sports

on the 16th of May, 1939, at 3-30 p.m.

at

Tomkins Barracks.

R.S.V.P.

(This includes wives.)

These invitations are always accepted, and a certain proportion of senior and junior officers from other regiments are forced to make an appearance ; to do otherwise is to slight the hosts.

Regimental sports mean that the regiment in question is 'At Home,' and therefore it behoves all who attend to do so in fine raiment. The average officer to-day hates what he calls 'A Gent's Natty Suiting' with a deadly loathing, and the wearing of it is a torment. Grey flannel trousers and a sports coat are what he likes, and wears, in the normal course of events. It is a fact that the soldier, who is now allowed to wear civilian clothes when not on duty, is far more beautifully turned out than is his officer.

The best way to describe these sports is to attend one of them. It is 3.35 on a hot afternoon when we approach the spot where the torture is taking place, and

rows and rows of expensive-looking cars are drawn up in the car park. We hide our humble bicycles and walk towards the entrance to the ground, as if we had just stepped from our Lagonda ; a military policeman salutes, and a red-faced, perspiring drummer-boy hands us our programmes.

The senior lady present with the regiment is receiving the guests with smiles and handshakes. To one side several shy and embarrassed subalterns, also from the regiment, are standing, and they are fully aware of their unusual clothes, which take the general form of saxon tweed suits, or grey pin stripes, and it is obvious that they have recently been disinterred from the depths of some box, also there will be a slight smell of camphor still clinging to them. They finger their ties and shuffle until one of them springs forward to guide women guests to their seats.

After shaking hands we pass on to find our own seats, not being accompanied by a woman, and we smile at the subalterns, who reply with sheepish grins. Facing the middle of the sports ground are several very long rows of chairs, where in the centre of the front row have been placed a big chesterfield and one or two plump arm-chairs. These are for the Great Ones when they arrive, but we lesser beings have to be content with wooden chairs which are too small and very hard.

Looking along the line of chairs we see one or two people whom we know, but they are unreachable, because to try and approach them would mean facing a barrage of indignant looks and stumbling over thirty pairs of legs and feet. Instead, we sit down in the fourth row and study the programme, where we learn that relay races, half-mile, mile, and three-mile races are to be run by overheated privates. Men are also to leap over hurdles,

spring into long jumps, or hurl themselves over sticks placed at great heights.

Event number five is about to be run, and it is a three-mile race, and so peeping through the rows of heads in front we see a line of men drawn up at the starting-post. Someone fires a pistol and, with a convulsive start, the men begin to run. Around and around the track they go, and so many times that we lose count. Then one man, who has run faster than any of the others, catches up the rear, being a complete lap ahead, and he becomes lost in the crowd, and so in the end we have no certain ideas as to who has won. An N.C.O., however, with a voice like a bull in pain, informs us that Private Snooks of 'C' Company has won. We all applaud in the usual manner.

The afternoon wears on; the regimental band plays at intervals, whilst men run, hurdle, and tug, and we become more and more bored. Suddenly, however, there is a diversion; a personage has arrived. People become agitated and we all get to our feet and remove our hats whilst with gracious mien, and followed by a wife who wears a large, floppy hat (why do wives of personages in the East always wear hats of this kind?), he passes down to the chesterfield and sits down. We subside.

It is now close upon five o'clock, and we turn our eyes towards a very large tent with open sides and a flat roof, where there are many small tables at which we shall be given food in the form of weak tea, sweet cakes, and ices. At the back of this tent, and laid out on a tiered stand, is the regimental silver, consisting of vast trophies, silver bowls like a baby's bath, shields, and centre pieces, besides innumerable smaller silver cups. Beside the array stands a private who is, and does not mind, looking bored, his one desire is to be allowed

to sit down and smoke a cigarette ; but he comforts himself with the thought of the whiskies and sodas which will be offered to him later on.

Men run and run, and the band plays on. How long, dear Lord ? How long ?

There comes at last a slight commotion from the chesterfield, and our hearts rejoice ; the great are to be led into tea. As soon as their table is seated everyone rushes to secure a place, because undue haste to reach any free meal in India is not looked upon as bad manners. At a ball, at which I was present many years ago, two women fainted in the rush and crush to reach the supper-room.

Tea finished we go back to our chairs, after passing a few remarks with acquaintances, to find that men are still taking part in some form of sport. A sad melancholy settles down upon us, and we long with passionate intensity to be allowed to depart. At 6.15 things come to an end ; the personage has long since departed, lucky fellow, but the remainder of the guests group themselves behind a table where the senior lady prepares to present the prizes.

Overheated and embarrassed privates come up one by one and receive their tiny cups, or medals, a gracious smile, and a handshake. That the soldiers in question would much rather have the value of the medals, interests no one. I wonder what happens to all the medals won at sports, because there must be thousands and thousands of them somewhere, but rarely do you see them. In the old days they adorned watch-chains, but as no one wears such things in these days they must just fade away, like old soldiers.

We also take this opportunity to fade away, and once again on our bicycles we sigh with relief, and make

for more congenial surroundings. We are, however, fortified with the knowledge that we have done our social duty.

One regimental event to which I was invited in Peshawar was an entirely different matter. It was in the lines of the Highland Light Infantry, and the trooping of their colour. Never have I seen a more magnificent display. It was equal to anything seen on the Horse Guards' Parade, when the colour is trooped before the King.

(IV)

I was bicycling one evening towards the club, fortunately in company with a man who could speak and understand Punjabi, and we were in the act of passing the cricket club grounds when we witnessed what might have been a nasty accident.

A groom of dignified appearance was riding a beautiful chestnut mare, who was mincing her way on the tan like a ballet dancer. They approached a corner around which, without warning, came a fat *babu* riding a bicycle on the wrong side of the road. He applied both brakes, but in spite of this, he very nearly hit the mare head on. Stopping dead he wobbled ludicrously, almost under the mare's nose, and then fell off, his machine going one way, and he another.

My companion, knowing the Indian very well, suggested that we stop and watch what happened. We did. The syce dismounted, looped the reins over his right arm, and bore down upon the *babu*, who was sitting on the road replacing his glasses which had slipped down his nose. The syce bent over that fat *babu*, and he spoke : he spoke for well over a minute, and he did not pause for breath. I say spoke, because

he did not appear to have lost his temper, but the cold and concentrated venom in his voice was obvious to me, although I did not understand all that he said.

In the end the *babu*, who had sat with a dawning horror creeping over his face, arose, snatched up his bicycle and fled. The syce calmly twirled his moustaches, mounted the mare and continued on his way. I enquired of my companion as to what had been said, and this is what he told me.



“Fat ape that thou art. May five hundred dogs use your face as a corner stone ! In future look where thou goest, father of a hyena, a naughty daughter, and a noseless wife. May thy house be shamed, thou paunchy robber of the poor. Go, before I make a eunuch of thee. Hadst thou touched the mare I would have slit thy fat throat. Devil’s spawn.”

Lying in bed that night I remembered the affair and let my mind play with it. How typical of India it was, where rows between Indians resemble dog-fights, in that the more noise there is, the less dangerous they are.

That syce had not raised his voice in anger, and yet I was certain he meant every word he had said. How original and imaginative his curses had been, and how *different* would have been my own, had I been on that mare. I should probably have been mildly annoyed and said :

‘ Why don’t you look where you are going ? Fool,’ or ‘ What the Hell do you think you’re doing ? ’ or ‘ Damn your eyes. Why can’t you keep on the right side of the road ? ’

From this I thought of a few more unusual curses I had heard.

‘ Thy father was a hyena and thy mother a jackal.’

‘ Thy mother was born under a basket.’

‘ May thy wife be barren, and all thy children daughters.’

‘ May thy daughters be shamed and thy house one of ill fame.’

‘ Oh son of a grey ape. Scratcher and eater of lice.’

‘ Seller of pig’s flesh.’

‘ Oh dog ! Eater of swine.’

‘ Son of an owl. Senseless as a parrot.’

Our own curses and abuse are threadbare, dull, and most lacking in imagination. It would be so much more amusing to those looking on, if we copied the Oriental.

‘ Your father always travels without a ticket.’

‘ Your sister walks at night in dark lanes.’

‘ Your brother paints his face.’

‘ Your father steals pennies from school-children.’

‘ May all your cheques be returned R.D., and all your stocks fall.’

‘ Your wife prefers commercial travellers.’

These have possibilities, but I have had to be careful and not allow myself to get out of hand. But consider two London charladies having a difference of opinion in this manner, after a tour of the gin palaces. The mind staggers at the thought.



## CHAPTER V

(1)

THE battery returned from its infantry camp, and almost at once prepared to go off to attend the annual practice camp. Each year batteries of artillery are sent to the ranges to undergo fourteen days inquisition, at which the torturers, like all their breed, prevaricate and say to all and sundry who will listen, that the camp is going to be a delightful holiday with which will be combined just a little helpful gathering of knowledge and experience. We Gunners, however, know better. These people, with deceitful smiles, descend from rarified atmospheres, and they say :

“Now see what a pleasant time we are all going to have. Just going to drop a nice little shell here, and another one there. Let us begin at once.” But in the privacy of their tents, they lick their lips and sharpen their claws. Who are these people? They cower behind such abbreviations as B.R.A., G.S.O.R.A., I.G., A.I.G., R.O., M.G.R.A., C.S.O., S.O. to M.G.R.A., A.O., T.E. in G. and S.<sup>1</sup>

The B.R.A. is the ‘Torturer in Chief’ and the remainder are his myrmidons (except the M.G.R.A.), and they are always known to others, and themselves, by

<sup>1</sup> Brigadier Royal Artillery. General Staff Officer Royal Artillery. Instructor of Gunnery. Assistant Instructor of Gunnery. Range Officer. Major-General Royal Artillery. Camp Staff Officer. Staff Officer to Major-General Royal Artillery. Attached Officers. Technical Expert in Gas and Smoke.

these abbreviations, partly because code names, and other mystifying terms, are very much the fashion in the army to-day.

We were told recently, at the fount of all military knowledge, that a most misleading method, when one commander was talking to another, by telephone, or wireless, and when an enemy might be supposed to be listening-in, was for them to use to each other their pet names. This means that, in the next war, we shall have something like this.

An army commander is talking over the telephone to the general officer commanding in chief.

A.C. : "Hullo. Is that you Stinker? What about letting me send Piggy up to Pansy? Pansy's crowd is damned weak, you know. It'll stiffen up the front line a bit, I think. It badly needs it."

G.O.C. in C. : "Right oh, Dog's Body. That's O.K. with me. I heard that Fifi had a hell of a knocking about this morning. Tell 'em I am sorry to hear it."

A.C. : "All right Stinker, I will. Piggy'll be furious, I am afraid. He's just gone out for a rest. I'd be glad if you'd say something to him. Pansy will chortle, of course."

Piggy and Pansy are commanders of divisions, whilst Fifi is the code name for a brigade of field artillery, and if such a conversation does not completely mystify a listening enemy I shall be very surprised.

The day arrived for the battery, together with three others in the brigade, to set out by road for the ranges at Nowshera, twenty-seven miles southward from Peshawar on the Grand Trunk Road. At 6.45 a.m. it was still dark on the parade ground, where the mules were standing already loaded up with their pieces of the guns. A covey of lorries was being loaded with a multitude of stores,

and shadowy figures were running about, carrying this or that.

At 7 a.m. I gave the order to march. A mountain battery walks at a steady four miles an hour, which includes a ten minutes' halt in each hour. This may not seem unduly fast to those who have not tried this pace, yet when hung about with military equipment, under a hot sun, to those not used to it, it is exhausting in the extreme. I did it and know.

Out on the Grand Trunk Road the battery settled down into its stride, determined to reach camp in the early afternoon. The dawn was a flaming one, and in it the country-side awoke to life where the mynahs chattered like starlings, running to and fro on the side of the road with fussy importance; the unwieldy bullock-carts creaked their way out from the side roads; and from the roadside houses there came much coughing and spitting from those at their morning toilet. There were also *tongas* filled with fat *babus* on their way to the city, and carts piled high with sugar-cane.

Although each officer is allowed a horse to ride, it is not considered the correct thing to make use of it when the battery is on the line of march. The British gunners walk, and the officers should do the same, is the idea behind this and so I walked at the head of the battery; I who had not walked for more than a mile or two in the last several years, and then at a leisurely pace. After the fifth milestone had been passed I began to wonder how I was going to march the remaining twenty-two. I eventually forced myself to walk fifteen of those miles, but for the last five I had to take to my horse altogether, my knees refusing to support me any longer.

Kipling wrote graphically about the romance and interest of the Grand Trunk Road, but I felt he cannot



#### THOSE WHO LIVE IN THE NORTH

(Top) A typical group of officers who fight our Frontier wars  
 (Bottom) British gunners who used to serve in the old British Mountain Batteries



have walked along the same stretch as we did. Had he done so he must have experienced the miles after miles of straight road, lined with dusty green trees and a flat country-side, which was very dull under a hot sun ; it became very hot indeed as the day drew on. The only thing of real interest that we passed was the large village of Pubbi, which has a very evil reputation because it harbours most of the thieves, bad hats, and evil-minded of the district, but it seemed peaceable enough as we passed through it.

On, and on, and on, we marched, with the mules jinkity-jogging along, with their long ears flapping ; and beside them strode our British gunners, dusty it is true, but showing no signs of fatigue. Just when I was beginning to wonder if Nowshera really existed, the trees and bungalows of the cantonment beside the yellow Kabul river loomed up and we had arrived.

The battery reached the camp, which was sited beyond the railway on the far side of the cantonment, and was soon settling down into the area allotted to it. Loads were removed and the animals led off to water ; harness was neatly piled and tied up and placed behind each mule's standing ; the guns put together, and lined up, and all firearms collected and handed over to the guard. At night all revolvers and rifles were chained to the gun-wheel of a gun which was run into the guard tent, because to lose by theft one of these is utter shame, to say nothing of the baskets of raspberries handed out to the battery commander by those in authority.

Speaking of rifle thieves reminds me of an amusing incident that took place not far away from our camp. A Highland regiment was sleeping heavily in its tents after a long day's march, when silently, and swiftly as a snake in a hurry, there came a rifle thief into their midst.

He insinuated himself into a tent and laid hands upon a rifle, but on preparing to depart in haste with his prize, he found, to his horror, that it had on the other end a large and very angry Highlander, the rifle being attached to his wrist by a strong strap. That Highlander arose and he jumped on the thief's stomach and very nearly killed him in doing so.

When all in the battery was as it should have been ; the animals contentedly pushing their muzzles into well-filled nose-bags, and the British and Indians surging about their cookhouses, I went off to find my own tent. A square, comfortable one, in which it was possible to move about whilst standing up, I found, to my surprise, that it was filled with elegant furniture, including an inviting-looking bed.

One by one the other batteries arrived, and later in the evening, in spite of our weariness, several men and myself piled ourselves into a car and set out for the Nowshera Club. In the bar we found a cheery set of fellows who at once set out to be as hospitable as they were able and it was here that I met an elderly, amiable, but extremely talkative person who went by the name of the Purple Emperor. There is little so exhausting as to be talked at for long periods, and I had some difficulty in parting from him.

Purple reminds me of a true, and little known story of India. The comptroller of a certain Viceroy's household was a man of resource. The Vicereine had a passion for all things mauve and she was a lady of much majesty. One day the comptroller had what he thought was a brain wave. He sat down, wrote a letter, and, in due course, a fat package arrived for him by post. He undid it, examined the contents, and was enchanted. Going to a certain House of Meditation he

hung up a slim packet, it being toilet paper of a delicate shade of purple. His thoughtfulness was not, however, appreciated, and he hastily departed to other fields of usefulness, and a new and less considerate comptroller took his place.

## (II)

That first night in the camp I left the club early, and, after dinner in the mess, went to bed, where I slept dreamlessly and blissfully unaware of what was taking place only a few yards from my tent. The following morning I was awakened by an agitated major, belonging to one of the other batteries, who, clad only in pyjamas, was standing in the doorway of my tent. His hair was standing on end, and there was a wild look in his eye.

“Have you lost anything?” he enquired.

“Lost what?” I replied, only half awake.

“Why, anything, of course. The —s have taken every stitch I have got. They’ve only left me these.” He slapped his pyjamas with a furious gesture.

I leapt out of bed in a fright and thereupon all but sank to the floor. Clutching the dressing-table for support I gazed around the tent, and with relief saw that most of my possessions appeared to be present. The story of what occurred was this.

The camp was protected from intruders by only four single strands of barbed wire, and somewhere between the hours of two a.m. and three a.m. that morning, two sons of shame drove up in a *tonga*, got out, cut the wire, and walked into the camp. They visited the tents of six officers who were sleeping deeply. They ravished the major of all his clothes and deprived the other officers in varying degrees. One of the thieves tried to remove the blanket from the form of my quarter-master sergeant,



but he, however, arose and in company with another N.C.O., they hunted that robber. One thief threw a brick and hit the N.C.O. in the stomach, and he thinking it was a knife, it stopped the hue and cry. The regimental sergeant-major was also visited, and the sight of this important personage, the following morning, stalking up and down the lines the picture of rampant and inarticulate fury, clad only in a shirt, pair of breeches, and socks, all that remained to him, made me laugh, sorry as I was for him. The tracks left by the ravishers were



clear, being strewn with odd socks, pullovers, empty suit-cases, and other pathetic odds and ends. Beyond the wire the tracks of the *tonga* led away from the cantonments towards a semi-desert, where half a mile distant several empty and ripped-open

suit-cases were found, but nothing else was ever recovered. The police came, made notes, looked, and went away, and that was all the satisfaction we gained from them.

I lost nothing, for which I offered up a fervent prayer of thanks. There is, however, a moral attached to this story. It is: 'Do not stay too late at the club.' All the officers who had lost things were those who had wine, dined, and danced into the early hours of that morning, returning to fall into their beds. I suspect that they were in a state which caused them to sleep heavily.

For the remainder of my stay in the camp I had all

my movable possessions tied up with strong telephone wire. We were not, however, visited again.

(III)

I stated a few paragraphs back that, on getting out of bed, I nearly sank to the floor. The reason for this was that I was so stiff after the march of the day before that my body did not seem to be my own, but some poor, new, strange thing that refused to do as it was told, in fact I knew at that time what it feels like to be ninety years of age.

Later in the day one of the torturers, in the form of a brigade-major, gave us strange pieces of paper, the like of which I had never seen before. They suggested that an active earwig had taken an ink bath and played touch and run with a skittish lady earwig. What fun they must have had, because they completely covered the paper in thick black lines, few of which ran in the same direction.

Outraged enquiries brought to light the fact that this was a new form of map, and that the following day officers were to go out on to the ranges and mark on it such objects as could be definitely located on the ground. This paper had nothing on it at all except the black lines.

"What are you making such a fuss about?" enquired the brigade-major. "It's easy. I often do it. It'll do you a lot of good."

"Yes, to my Aunt Sarah," I replied. "What do you take me for? I'm not a ruddy magician. Besides, it makes me dizzy to look at it."

The brigade-major departed.

The next day we set out for the ranges. I had given the so-called maps to my battery captain and told him to

get on with what had to be done. That is known as decentralizing, of which I have spoken before, and so, pained but obedient, he collected a battery commander's assistant, a range-finder, and a surveyor. These N.C.O.s, like ourselves, were mounted, but they were hung about with strange forms of artillery expression in the guise of leather boxes and cases.

Artillery ranges are always long, narrow, and extremely barren pieces of country, but those at Nowshera surpassed anything I had yet met, where they turned out to be miles and miles of nothing at all, split up by wide and deep *mullabs* and dry river beds. It was that exasperating type of country where an object seen on a ridge may, in actual fact, be on one of several others. Riding swiftly across the stony, ochre-coloured earth, we came to a hill on which there was a concrete building known as an O.P. (Observation Post.) Dismounting, the captain stated that from this point he would attempt to locate two distant and lone trees, as well as two other O.P.s. He, the B.C.A., and the remainder, then went into conference, whilst I stood by as an interested spectator.

In due course, about two hours, during which I had become excessively bored, the captain came and said that he had finished.

"We are here," he said, pointing to a pencil mark on the paper. "Those trees are there, and there. I think that this is that, and that is this." He pointed now at the map, and now at the landscape. "I don't, however, feel too happy about these and those, but they should be right within a few hundred yards."

"How nice," I said. "Let us go home."

We went. But my captain has grey hairs, and I am not surprised.

Here in brief outline is what happens to us Gunners

when we go out and play at war on our ranges. Those not interested should skip this section ; but I strongly advise a glance at it, because after all, the reader probably pays highly towards the army, and he should know something of what he is getting for his money.

There are two favoured forms of artillery expression, and I will deal with each in turn. The evening before a battery goes out to do its firing it is given a paper which briefly states that Northland and Southland are at war ; this is known as putting you in the picture. Actually it gives you an idea as to where the targets are going to be, because it also says that the enemy is holding that line, and our troops this line. The battery is told to be in action and ready to fire its guns at a definite spot, and time.

The following morning the battery marches out, the guns are brought into action, and at the same time an observation post (O.P.) is established which will give a view of the country over which the battery will shoot. Telephonic communication is made between the O.P. and the battery, and the guns are made to point in a definite direction. The battery commander at the O.P. has with him an assistant, a rangefinder, and some signalers, and he sits just behind the crest of his chosen hill and waits for the directing staff to come upon the scene.

In due course, at a more respectable hour, a cloud of dust appears on the horizon, and a cavalcade arrives at the foot of the hill. It is made up of the brigadier, the colonel, the adjutant, the instructor of gunnery, brigade-major, and attached officers. A word concerning the attached officers. They are a flock of officers from other branches of the service, who have been torn from their regiments, or corps, to spend a week or more in our camps. They are taken willy nilly here and there across

the ranges, over difficult ground, when riding upon the backs of wild horses, which they, unused to this form of transport, loathe and fear. They spend long hours at O.P.s, where they strive to understand, and be interested in, something which is always a mystery to them.

Horses (now cars) disposed of, the brigadier climbs the hill, followed by the remainder, and the battery commander prepares for the worst. He gets to his feet, salutes, and, according to his temperament, smiles, grins, or looks depressed. It is interesting to note that nervous battery commanders always infuriate artillery brigadiers, who promptly get their teeth into them, and the sound of rending flesh turns the colonel pale and the young gunner subalterns a delicate pea-green in colour. The brigadier, the colonel, and the instructor of gunnery, now go into conference, where papers are consulted, arms waved, screens put up and taken down, and the battery's signaller is heard whispering into his telephone that the 'Old Man' has arrived.

Suddenly the brigadier turns and calls up the waiting battery commander. He paints the picture by saying how our troops are being held up, and he points to where they are supposed to be on the ground, and says that the infantry are crying out for artillery support.

"You see that over there?" he says, pointing into the distance. "That's your target. Get on with it."

That may be one of many things, from a square canvas screen to a lone tree, or a pile of stones.

The battery commander makes some rapid calculations followed by a stream of orders which are sent down to the officer in charge of the battery by means of the telephone. The battery reports, later, that the guns are ready to fire, which means that they are, we hope, pointing somewhere in the direction of the target. The

order to fire is given, the guns boom, and shells should arrive in the neighbourhood of the target where they burst in clouds of smoke and dust. The subsequent business of directing the fire of the guns so that the shells actually fall on to the target is played according to certain rules, and woe to the battery commander who fails to observe them. Directing the fire of guns means that they are made to point more to the left, or right, and to elevate, or depress, which gives added, or lesser, range.

When the shoot is over the battery commander, or the officer conducting the shoot, whether he hits the target or not, is told that he should have done it in some different manner, and in all my long years of service I can remember but four occasions on which the staff said that a perfectly conducted shoot had been made, and I must have witnessed many hundreds. Should an officer be unfortunate enough to hit the target with the first round of gunfire he at once antagonizes the brigadier who has to bide his time, criticism having been stifled for the moment.

The second form of artillery expression is for a battery to be told to go and wait at a spot where it can be easily found. The brigadier goes ahead with the staff and sends back for the officer who is to be tortured. This officer arrives hurriedly on a horse, or in a car, and tears up the hillock on which the staff is gathered. Being then on his feet he is much out of breath. He salutes, the brigadier takes him by the arm and points to where, two thousand yards away, are a line of dummies just appearing over a crest.

"Those are an enemy rush coming over the crest. Get your battery into action and knock 'em out," he says.

The officer leaps down the slope like a mountain goat,

casts himself on to his horse, or into his car, and hurtles back to the battery. In a few moments he reappears, but this time he is accompanied by several other people. Climbing the hill again he makes frantic calculations whilst the battery scampers into action below, and close at hand. If it is a mountain battery a cloud of mules come rushing up, pieces of guns are torn off their backs, and the guns leap into being in an astonishingly quick space of time. The mules at this time are always excited and a good deal of bucking takes place. Speed in getting off the first round of gunfire is the great point of these manœuvres, and the target can be likened to driven pheasants, for once the guns are in action they are made to appear all over the country-side.

That, briefly, is what takes place throughout a day's shooting on the ranges, with, of course, a large number of variations on the main themes. During a camp all officers shoot the battery several times, and most of the more senior N.C.O.s are also given practice.

At Nowshera, in the year of which I am writing, was a small man, and considering all things, amiable. He, however, was inclined to become excited, and if things did not go well during a shoot at the O.P. he would

become very red in the face, stamp up and down, wave his papers, and mutter to himself. On more than one occasion he tore off his helmet and flung it to the ground and on one historic occasion, he actually stamped on it in his rage, which ruined a perfectly good helmet.



Here is an example of how things can go wrong, and how easily.

A nervous major was carrying out a shoot on a target on a far distant ridge, where for several reasons things had not been going as they should and the brigadier was becoming restive, but had not reached the hat-casting stage. Suddenly he turned to the major and told him to stop the guns firing, as it was no good going on. This order was promptly sent down to the battery over the telephone. Everyone present, and there were many, now relaxed. There was a long pause, after which, to everyone's surprise, there came the sound of a battery firing, and one or two shells burst close to the target. The brigadier's jaw dropped, and the major looked worried.

"Did you send down that order to stop firing?" inquired the brigadier, with ominous calm.

"Yes, sir," replied the major. "But I will repeat it."

The order to cease firing was again sent down to the battery, but once more shells fell near the target. This was too much for the brigadier, who exploded. Casting his papers from him, he dashed at the startled battery signaller, snatched the telephone from him, and, in an awful voice, demanded to speak with the officer in charge of the guns. A pause followed during which still more shells exploded. The brigadier quivered, and the rest of us stood by and wondered what could have happened at the battery.

"Hullo. Who's that speaking?" roared the brigadier into the telephone. "Oh, it's you, is it? Why the devil don't you obey orders? Twice you've been ordered to stop firing. What the hell do you think you're doing?"

There followed a slight pause.

"What?" The brigadier's voice had risen almost to



a squawk. "You say you haven't fired any gun since you got the first order? Then who the devil has?"

The telephone was handed back to the signaller.

"Jones says he stopped the guns firing at once," said the brigadier to the colonel. "Find out who is firing. At once."

We, in the meantime, watched several more shells fall, and the mystery deepened. Everyone who could find a telephone spoke into it, signal flags were waved, and the staff ran about in an agitated manner. Then came the explanation. It appeared that, earlier in the proceedings, the brigadier himself had sent off a staff officer with several of the infantry officers to a flank, and he had told the staff officer to carry out a shoot with another battery for the edification of the infantry officers. This staff officer, strangely enough, had picked upon the same target as the one at which we had been shooting. The brigadier had entirely forgotten the existence of this officer, and the orders that he had given him.

There was little criticism during the next few shoots.

Connected with practice camps are those vile, but necessary, documents known as Confidential Reports. These are made out on the year's work by colonels on all their officers when the brigades return to their stations after practice. Among junior officers little or no notice is taken by the War Office unless the report is definitely a bad one. When, however, an officer comes up for consideration as to whether he shall be promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, or higher, the War Office unearths all his past reports and weighs them up.

In theory, the reports are supposed to give, without partiality, favour, or affection, the reporting officer's opinion of the ability, character, social behaviour,

AND weaknesses of the officer in question. The trouble with these reports, however, lies in the thorny problem as to what makes, or does not make, a good officer. Some colonels always give the most glowing reports, others try and conscientiously carry out their instructions, and a few allow their personal likes and dislikes to creep into a report. We Gunners, moving frequently from one brigade to another, can produce some bewilderingly varied reports which leave those, who have to decide one way or the other at the War Office, in a state of acute indecision.

I have never had a really good report, but, on the other hand, I have never had a bad one. In the past, remarks such as : Impulsive ; Inclined to be tactless ; Temperamental ; Flippant, dotted my reports. One very crooked remark was : ' He makes a better commander than he does a subordinate.'

In the army, as opposed to the navy, we do see what is said about us, and are thereby given a chance to correct any faults we may have. If a report is definitely adverse an officer can fight it if he has good grounds for doing so.

It would give me exquisite pleasure to write reports on some officers I know.

(rv)

Nowshera is a pleasant little station full of trees and pretty gardens, but it is surrounded by the hills and bad men and so is wired-in like Peshawar. During our stay at the camp we saw something of those who lived in cantonments.

On Sunday mornings, from noon onwards, most of the station would foregather on the lawn in front of the club to listen to one of the regimental bands and it was

amusing to watch them, because I realized how typical they all were of a small Indian station. The tubby majors, thinner and more elegant captains and their wives, and subalterns of the usual type. There was the spreader of the station gossip, a woman who looked like a cook out of work ; and the not-so-young-as-she-was married woman with a bright smile and a grim determination to hang on to her fast receding youth.

Near to where we are seated in our cane chair is a dried-up little woman of many Indian summers who is always at hand in sickness, or trouble, and who pours out her accumulated wisdom for the benefit of the young wives just out from home. There is present, of course, the exotic young wife who is dressed as for Ascot, wears blood-stained finger-nails and a perpetual come-hither smile. The callow youths of the station sit at her feet refusing to believe their seniors who assure them that she is so virtuous that it amounts almost to a vice.

A band plays tunelessly and I am feeling pleasantly content when the inevitable station horsy-man comes drifting across the grass slapping his gaiters and smelling of stables, dogs, and horse-sweat. He addresses a man in our circle.

"Have just been out on the mare, old man. Thought she was going a bit short yesterday. She's all right to-day."

He is then introduced to the remainder of us and sits down in a chair beside me. I sigh, knowing his type. He talks horse and his powers of fascination on a horse for five minutes so that I come annoyed because I want to listen to the band, but cannot do so with this person neighing at me. A devil in me rises up and I turn and say :

"Yes, I saw you going out this morning. A fine mare,

but I felt a bit doubtful about her." I shake my head. "In spite of her looks I believe she's a knocker."

"Rot, my dear fellow, she never did such a thing in her life. Sound as a bell."

"Well, I'd have sworn she was," I say with another shake of the head."

The man begins to show signs of excitement.

"If you'll come over this evening you can try her. I bet you ten chips (rupees) that she ain't anything of the kind."

At this point I glance at the remainder of the circle and see that two men are looking puzzled. One of them leans forward.

"What is a knocker?" he asks. "I've never heard the term before."

I grin.

"Really?" I reply, in feigned astonishment. "Well, a knocker is a horse which drops dung on to one hock and knocks it off with the other."

The horsey man's laugh against himself rings hollow and he shortly departs, whilst those seated at nearby tables turn to see what the joke is.

A dog fight is now staged on the far side of the lawn and every other dog present, there are at least a dozen, leaps to his feet and rushes off to join in the fun. The hideous din rises high above the band, who play on. The combatants separated and order restored, and a few semi-hysterical animals chided by their masters, we decide that it is time to return to the camp for luncheon.

There are few things quite so depressing as heavy rain when under canvas and it rained on more than one occasion at Nowshera as if someone had opened a sluice gate up above. Heavy clouds rolled up from the south and in a few moments our neat lines became transformed

where the dust turned to soggy, pale mud, and the mules were depressed, standing with lowered heads, whilst the rain ran off their long ears, and dripped from the ends of their flywhisk-like tails. A cold breeze ran about between the tents and they flapped in protest, and in my office there was that pungent smell of damp earth, primitive and strong. In the canvas roof of our mess tent lakes formed and their contents dripped through to fall into our food and drinks, to damp the chairs, and turn the newspapers into sodden masses.

With deep relief the battery left the camp before its conclusion, because we had to prepare for a move to Quetta and the time was growing near. The battery marched back to Peshawar, but I drove ahead in a high-powered car.

## CHAPTER VI

(1)

**B**ORN out of the political gropings of the Indian Government, by way of Army Headquarters, we received a highly unpalatable order. It stated that, on March 14, 1937, certain Light Batteries would cease to exist, and that Mountain Batteries would be formed from them. Light Batteries, of which mine was one, are really British Mountain Batteries, but have been wrongly called 'Light' since the war. A Mountain Battery, except for the British officers, has all Indian ranks; whereas British Batteries have British gunners, and Indians as drivers.

The order went on to say that my British gunners were to be sent to Field, Medium, and Anti-Aircraft Batteries, as and when their places were gradually taken by Indians. Although I had known that this order was in process of being born, the fact of seeing it lying on my blotting-pad made no difference to my feelings. I had hoped, right up to the last, that something would happen to prevent this shocking occurrence.

It meant that, almost without a murmur, the Royal Regiment of Artillery was allowing itself to be deprived of one of its oldest and most cherished possessions. Kipling wrote the poem 'Screw-Guns,' which sang of the British Mountain Batteries.

“ . . . I walks in my old brown gaiters along o’ my  
old brown mule,  
With seventy gunners behind me, an’ never a  
beggar forgets,  
It’s only the pick of the Army that handles the  
dear little pets.”

Filled with wrath, grimly I thought of those lines as I stared at the paper before me. Indian history and British Mountain Batteries are closely linked and my own battery had nearly two hundred years of tradition, and fighting, behind it. It had fought up and down India with the East India Company, taking part in many famous battles, and a host of well-known officers, including Field-Marshal Earl Roberts of Kandahar, had served in it. In a few weeks time all would be as if it had never existed. The Gunners would be scattered all over India, its name and number expunged, and its records stowed away in some dusty file at Woolwich. Did the authorities realize what they were doing in utterly destroying this branch of the regiment ?

In the bitterness of my thoughts I felt that sentiment, tradition, and *esprit de corps*, were being stifled by petrol fumes. I went a step further and determined I would have none of this mountain battery, which was to step into my cherished one’s shoes. I would hie me away to another which at least had British gunners. Indians are good fellows in very many ways, but they are not British gunners, or even faint shadows of them.

The grand old hefty, cheery, hard-swearing, hard-drinking mountain gunner died with the late war, but much of his splendid spirit remained. Our Gunners were picked men, because they had to lift on to mules’ backs loads which normally take two men to handle, and they had to toil up mountain sides, drop into action on the top, and hurl their shells accurately on to an enemy who was as wily as a fox, and who could run as fast.

The batteries, as their name implies, were almost exclusively used in the little wars on the Frontier of India where they supported the line regiments, both Indian and British, with their shell-fire. As the closest touch has to be kept between the regiment concerned and the battery, not a little of the success depended upon personal contact. The officers fed, fought, and marched together, as did their men, resulting in many firm friendships being formed between all ranks. Some battalion and brigade commanders demanded, before they went into action, that they should have the support of their own pet British Mountain Battery, and they generally got what they wanted.

It must not be thought that I am decrying the Indian Mountain Batteries, who have done, and will do, splendid work. The point is, that no Indian, however good, can compare with a British gunner.

There was an additional annoyance to be faced, and one which was very unpleasant. The battery was being moved to Quetta, in company with other British Mountain Batteries, who were also in process of being 'mountainized.' Before departure, however, we were forced to hand over the guns, saddlery, and other property to another which was coming from down country to take our place in Peshawar. We, therefore, had to send ahead an advance party to Quetta to take over a similar number of things from the one whose place we were taking there. No one who has not seen the multitudinous stores held by a battery, can conceive the labour involved in this unnecessary change over.

This procedure is now universal, when batteries are ordered to proceed by train from one station to another, and it is maddening to keen officers.



“What is the good,” they say, “of trying to put up a good show by spending time, money, and effort, on your harness, guns and other stores, if, as soon as you get them to the standard that you have set, you have to hand them over to someone else?”

The reason for this shameful business of handing over, from one battery to another, is that the Indian Government save a few rupees on the cost of baggage wagons and rolling stock. This saving is promptly poured out on some futile scheme which will probably be given up in a few months.

When I learned this news I lost all real interest in the battery : it really was not worth worrying about. I was losing the gunners, guns, animals, and stores, and all that was left would be a battery history and a name. In a few weeks even these would be gone.

It was with deep regret that I left Peshawar.

With only the bare personnel of the battery, the two days' journey to Quetta by troop train was not without incident. By previous arrangement food was to be provided at certain suitable railway stations and was for both British and Indian ranks, and was to be delivered by Indian contractors. Food was provided free for the British ranks, but the Indians were given a money allowance of four annas a day (5d.) with which to buy what they needed.

It was with the Indians that I first had trouble. At the appointed stations, in the mornings and evenings, two separate forms of food were supplied to the drivers, one for Hindus, and one for Mohammedans. We drew into a station at seven in the evening, and I told all ranks to get out of the train where the drivers at once made for their own particular food vendor, who was ready and waiting. In a twinkling of an eye a battle royal developed

with the food vendors, and a noisy affair it became. Enquiries as to what the trouble was brought to light the fact that both these particular sellers of food were trying to profiteer. I was requested to intervene, but refused, not being acquainted with the prices, and methods, of Indian profiteers. Calling up the two Indian officers I told them that it was their duty to settle the dispute. For close upon half an hour the battle raged, but finally the vendors gave way, beaten down by verbal torrents, deafened by fifty loud, indignant voices, and shaken by the quantity, and quality, of the abuse poured upon them by the hungry drivers.

Many days later I received a long petition, written on pink paper, saying that my Indian drivers had defrauded the food sellers, who were poor men, and therefore I had allowed food to be snatched from the mouths of their ravenous children. I soon settled that.

The British gunners, also, did not come off without trouble in this matter of food and the midday meal for them, provided by one contractor, was disgraceful. It was supposed to be a stew, but actually it consisted of a thin yellow liquid in which floated pallid pieces of potato and lumps of greasy gristle to which adhered occasional small bits of tough meat. Unfortunately there was nothing I could do at the time, but a subsequent letter caused that contractor's tail to be well and truly twisted.

Speaking of stews. What would the army do without its stew? Napoleon once said that an army marched on its stomach but I will coin a more up-to-date phrase. 'The British army fights on stew.' What hundreds and thousands of tons of it must have been consumed in the late war. What a highly hunger-whetting thing a well-made stew can be, but how horrid is a poor one.

There is one type of stew that I cannot abide—an Irish stew. Why Irish I wonder? Perhaps this is because it consists mainly of potatoes, this vegetable being the staple diet of the Irish peasant. And yet it is popular, being offered in all kinds of unexpected places. It always reminds me of an anæmic woman, with the dull pieces of mutton, crowned with white fat, the pallid onions, and sodden potatoes.

The only people who know how to make a stew are the Scottish, and they call it Hotch Potch. I know of a recipe from Scotland which, if properly followed, produces food for the gods.

All of which reminds me of an awful thing that happened to one of our stews in France during the war. My battery was in action on a mud patch on the Somme where we officers had, for our mess, a glorified kind of rabbit hole, one door of which led directly on to where our cook produced the food, under a shelter of a few sheets of iron.

One night, at dinner, seven of us had eaten fish from a tin, and were awaiting the coming of the usual stew. Suddenly there came, from behind the cookhouse door, the sound of a dull thud, a horrified yell, and the crashing of tin plates. Being close to the door I leaned across and flung it open and there, in the dim light, an astounding spectacle met our gaze.

The cook was standing facing us, and holding, almost upside down, a large saucepan which had once held our stew whilst at his feet, half-smothered in the stew, was a human head. What had happened was that a field battery not far away was being heavily shelled and one of its gunners' heads had been blown into our cookhouse, to arrive at the cook's feet just when he was serving up our food. We had bully beef that night and

considered the incident most amusing. Such is the mentality created by war.

(II)

It was early morning when I awoke to find the train nearing the top of the Bolan Pass, and the engine making a prodigious fuss, puffing and panting as if it could only just manage to climb the steep gradient. Once out of the pass and bowling along the flat, sandy plain, I looked from the windows into a rose-red dawn, where the high, barren mountains, still covered in snow, were painted a glowing pink and being now five thousand six hundred feet above sea-level the air was distinctly chilly. Peasants were moving out into the fields, and the country-side was slowly coming to life. Smoking a cigarette I wondered with a great wonder what the present day Quetta was going to be like, for I had known it in its heyday, when there were pleasant bungalows set in charming gardens, and the big native city full of interest and scallywags.

Before describing our arrival it would be as well to refresh the reader's memory regarding the earthquake. Some of the details given are not generally known, and may be of interest.

Those who were not present during those frenzied days of horror can have but the vaguest conception as to what took place. At 3.2 a.m. on 31 May 1935, the mountains moved when Quetta was sleeping deeply. Without warning the whole of the native city, and the buildings nearby, collapsed like a pricked balloon, where everything in the main track of the earthquake was destroyed. Huge, well-built houses, like that of the Agent to the Governor-General in Baluchistan, fell down as if made of cards, instead of stone and brick.

Over 20,000 people died as a result. Consider these numbers where if the dead had been laid out in rows, side by side, they would have covered an area of well over ten thousand square yards.

The earthquake had several curious features, and one of the strangest was the narrow and comparatively restricted area in which the full force was felt. Cantonments close by, and to the north of the city, were only mildly affected, and bungalows lying about two miles away hardly felt the shock. It was not until one or two officers had got out of their cars and gone down to the city, to return and spread the news, that cantonments awoke to the disaster. It is an actual fact that a party of students from the Staff College three miles away turned up at the aerodrome at 7 a.m. that morning to watch a demonstration which had been arranged for them. Entirely unaware of what had happened they were grimly told that the demonstration had already taken place, and were shown the hangars which looked as if some giant had tried to flatten them with thumps from his fists.

Had cantonments not escaped the mind staggers at the thought of what might have taken place after the disaster. There would have been, for example, few left to treat the injured, dig out the buried, feed the survivors, and most important of all, bury, or burn, the dead. Then, of course, to add to the misery, the wild tribes from the hills would have come down to loot and murder.

As soon as the true state of affairs was realized rescue work was put in hand, and the heroic work carried out has only been partly recognized. About 3500 troops were used; 300 military carts carried the dead to the graves or burning ghats. In the hospitals 10,000 persons were treated, and 4000 detained. Eighty-eight tons of wood

was used in two days to burn bodies. One British battalion, working with 700 men, extricated 867 people alive from the ruins of the native city, and 1178 dead. One surgeon actually carried out 159 major operations in four days, one every forty minutes. He was not even given an O.B.E.

Apart from the escape of cantonments, as a whole, two other fortunate things took place. The water and electric light were only slightly affected, and the railway so little damaged that it was possible to evacuate 14,000 people into India in the first week.

The medical authorities in Quetta at this time have been given little praise by the outside world. It is a curious thing that, in any disaster of this kind, everyone takes it for granted that the doctors will slave for long, weary hours, and perform what are miracles of healing and labour. When it is all over someone just remembers to give them hurried thanks.

What worried the doctors very considerably in Quetta was the strange delayed shock from which so many people suffered. Those buried in the ruins would be dug out and sent off to hospital where, outwardly, they appeared, except for bruises and cuts, little worse for their ordeal. Two, three, and even four days afterwards, the effects of shock developed, and many lay down and died, and no one could do anything for them. There is a recorded case of a man who had been deeply buried for three days, and when extricated he stood up, shook himself like a dog, smiled, walked forward four paces, and fell dead.

The earthquake was not of any great strength, but was unusual from the seismologist's point of view. The area of the greatest shock was long and comparatively narrow, but the force felt on either side of the main area

diminished with extraordinary rapidity. This is accounted for by the fact that the portion of Quetta most affected, the city, Lytton Road, and the aerodrome, where water lies close to the surface, are all low lying, compared with cantonments. Seismologists assure us that water-logged ground transmits earth shocks with much greater severity than does dry.

The cause of this particular earthquake was due to the great mountain ranges, which lie to the north, exerting undue pressure at an awkward angle. The plain on which Quetta stands was once a gigantic hole, which has gradually become filled by deposits washed down from the surrounding mountains, and it is said to be about 5000 feet deep, and that water seeping downwards has no outlet. In the 1931 earthquake the mountains shifted, and in doing so came up against a ledge of rock deep down in this hole. The 1935 earthquake is said to have been the result of this ledge giving way under extra pressure.

The local inhabitants of the area are firmly convinced that another earthquake is about due, and that this time the Quetta plain will vanish and its place be taken by a lake. The ground is to open and great rivers gush out, and in view of what has been said this legend is interesting and not entirely fantastic.

I am now going to try and drive home a little of the horror of this earthquake. Many people refuse to face unpleasant facts, and as a result the sympathy they offer is purely lip service; and lip service does not open purses, or produce cheques, so necessary on such occasions.

Imagine Private McIdol and Private Sandus, of No. 1 Platoon 'B' Company 1st Boxers, at 6 a.m. on 31 May 1935, as a portion of the battalion which is

being marched down to the native city to carry out rescue work. They carry pick-axes, shovels, and gas masks, and as they near the stricken spot they see a dark, heavy pall of smoke and dust hanging over what appears to be gigantic piles of rubble, out of which protrude pieces of wall, and fragments of houses.

Both men stare at the desolation and are appalled.

"Say, Sandy. Ain't it bloody awful? Seems like a judgment, don't it?" says McIdol, to his companion.

"Yes. They must all be as flat as pancakes, poor devils," replies Sandus. "Just think, I was only down here last Friday night. You remember that bit with the long black 'air and lovin' ways? I wonder where she is now?"

. They march on and are led, stumbling, over piles of rubble, out of which stick beams, pieces of iron, and furniture, fantastically crushed and twisted together. The officer in charge of No. 1 Platoon halts his men and details them off in pairs to definite areas, but whilst this is being done another shock takes place, and the men stagger as if drunk, and from all sides comes the rush and roar of falling masonry. The officer, when the earth becomes still once more, warns his men to keep clear of walls.

Private McIdol and Private Sandus find themselves regarding what was once a tall, narrow house, but whose front has fallen outwards into the street. The roof, in its collapse, has brought down with it most of the remaining walls, and the two men scramble up on to the pile of debris and look around.

"Where shall we begin, Mac?" enquires Sandus, his usually red face pale, and in his eyes a shadow of horror.

McIdol is short, dark, and made of sterner stuff.

"What abart this?" he answers, laying a hand on



a moderately sized beam which is protruding from a jumble of bricks and stone.

Putting down his shovel he starts to tug at the beam, and his friend assists him. Together they wrench and pull, and the beam comes away suddenly to be followed by a small avalanche of mud bricks. An officer, standing nearby, is attracted by the noise and calls out a warning.

"Take care over there. Don't go too fast, or you'll damage yourselves."

Both privates wipe the dust out of their eyes and start to dig down into the pile where they work in silence for some time. Suddenly McIdol straightens himself and turns a pale face to Sandus.

"My Gawd! Did yer hear that, Sandy?" he asks in an awed voice. "There's something alive down there. Come on, let's get at 'em."

Both men start digging again with redoubled vigour, and a shower of bricks and pieces of stone shoots upwards and outwards, just as if the two men were a couple of terriers digging holes in a rose bed.

It is Sandus who soon comes upon a body. First a shoulder, then a leg, and, finally, the whole body is cleared of wreckage. It is an elderly, fat Hindu, whose head is broken and has been pushed out of shape, and his stomach ripped open. Both men stare down in horror, neither of them having ever before seen a dead body. Quite suddenly Sandus, his face a dirty yellow in colour, turns aside and is very sick.

A passing corporal sees what is taking place and he scrambles up to the scene. He is a hard-bitten little man, who neither knows of, nor cares for, human weaknesses.

"What the hell do you two think yer are?" he demands. "A couple of silly whores? Go on. Get 'im out. That's what yer here for."

Pushing aside McIdol, the corporal bends down and, catching hold of the body's legs, he slowly drags the corpse clear.

"Leave 'im here," he says. "They'll come and take 'im away. The Niggers's arranging to collect 'em. They'll burn, or bury 'im. I agree he ain't a pretty picture, but yer'll get used to it before we've finished down 'ere."

He continues on his way.

A low and almost continuous moaning is now coming from somewhere close to McIdol's feet, and it galvanizes him into action once more. But Sandus sits on a stone and holds his head in his hands.

"I can't go on, Mac. Strewth, I can't."

McIdol, working like a beaver, by means of threats and abuse flung over his shoulder, manages to get his companion to start again, and in a short while they come upon the wreck of what had once been a bed.

"Gawd. I wonder what we're going to see now under that?" says Sandus.

"Shut yer trap and give me a 'and," replies McIdol rudely, but effectively.

They wrench aside the bed and so partly uncover another body. This time it is a young girl of about fifteen years of age. Lying on her back, her black hair partly hiding her face, she is alive, but unconscious and moaning. With McIdol at her shoulders, and Sandus at her feet, they carry the girl clear of the hole they have made and putting her down on a reasonably level spot they stand undecided as to what to do. The movement, none too gentle, has set the blood flowing again from several cuts in the girl's arms.

"What shall we do with her, Mac?"

"I dunno. Let's ask Snoopy. (The men's nickname for their platoon commander.) He'll tell us."

The officer in question orders the men to leave the girl where she is, adding that the ambulance men will soon arrive to pick her up.

Both men return to their digging and, in the course of the next hour, dig out two women and a boy, all of whom are dead. Suddenly both men realize that they are pouring with perspiration, covered with grime, and very thirsty.

"I could do with a bloody long drink, Sandy," says McDol, wiping his face with the back of his hand. "You go off and see if yer can find something."

It is now close upon eight o'clock, and the sun is beginning to make its heat felt as Sandus wanders away in search of water. A strong breeze starts to blow, clearing away some of the dust pall, but with it comes a stench that catches hold of Sandus' windpipe and half closes it. Coughing and choking he covers his nose with a grimy handkerchief.

An N.C.O. tells him that he will find the water not far away, and points vaguely in the direction of a large body of men who are fighting to put out a blazing pile of wreckage.

Before the water is found Sandus comes upon sights each of which seems more terrible to him than the last; things he could never have imagined possible in his wildest nightmares. Men, women, and children, some horribly mangled, are being brought to light in increasing numbers, and he passes within a few yards of a man who is screaming in dire torture, and cold shivers run up and down Sandus' spine. Unable to help himself, he stands and watches the man writhe in agony as an officer and N.C.O. strive to free his chest from a ragged piece of iron which is jammed under an immense pile of brick-work.

Moving on he comes to a partly clad woman who is sitting on a stone dangling a leg which is crushed beyond all hope, and Sandus notices that she looks down at it with uncomprehending eyes. Recovered bodies are lying in fantastic attitudes on all sides, waiting for the carts to come and carry them away; but it is the dead babies which affect him most. Wee, dead mites, some terribly mangled, lying with wide-open, onyx eyes, and mouths that refuse to shut.

Sandus no longer feels sick, and he wonders why this should be so.

He finds water at last, which is standing in buckets to one side of a cleared space in which a doctor is trying to do what he can for those brought to him, and his hands are covered in blood, as are his trousers; his face is pale and shining with perspiration. Nearby are scores of Indians madly hunting among the ruins where they howl, and yell, and weep. The doctor looks up and shouts to them to be quiet, but a woman screams piercingly as a man is dragged out of a hole.

Sandus drinks deeply from one of the buckets and then looks around for something to carry water in to his companion. A small, round, stiff cap, such as is worn by young Indian boys fulfils the purpose admirably.

McIdol is blasphemously grateful for the drink.

At eleven o'clock the men of the battalion are collected together, and their places taken by fresh workers. Begrimed, and weary, they march back to barracks, with set faces, in a strange, unusual silence.

And so, for days and days, the work went forward. Later on, men wearing gas masks, sickened and weary beyond measure, wondered in desperation if it would ever come to an end.

## (III)

On the outskirts of Quetta, on both sides of the railway line, we passed orchards in which were orderly lines of fruit trees covered with swelling buds. There were the remains of many crude houses, and tumbled walls, none of which had been repaired, and I gazed up at the huge brown mountains, which had closed in upon us, and it seemed as if they wore an air of menace.

Drawing into a siding beyond the station we pulled up, and I ordered the battery to detrain. As always, at such times, there was instantly much ordered confusion with N.C.O.s and men moving to and fro as they shot kits and stores from the trucks, to be either piled, or loaded into the waiting motor lorries.

It was just after eight o'clock, I had had no early morning tea and was feeling grubby, poorly shaved, and a little bad tempered, when my sergeant-major rushed up to where I was standing and informed me that a general was approaching. This news was as surprising as it was disconcerting because it was neither the time nor the place for generals. I went to meet the great man, who was no less a personage than the General Officer Commanding the District. Accompanied by a colonel on the staff, he had risen from his bed and, beautifully arrayed, had come down to greet the battery on its first arrival in the station. This graceful, kindly act took my breath away, especially as the colonel of my new brigade had not appeared (though he did so eventually).

I approached the general, saluted, and did my best to make suitable conversation. I hope I conveyed my appreciation, but I felt it lacked the warmth it should have shown. In due course I was permitted to withdraw and carry on with my work.



(Top) We will fight no more to day  
(Bottom) A Mountain Battery on Parade



The morning was diamond bright and cold as I drove away in my colonel's car on our way to the mess. We slid out into Lytton Road, which is a broad avenue lined with great trees, on either side of which once stood the pleasant houses of the civil and political administration, now all but the gardens and trees had gone. Where the imposing house of the Agent to the Governor-General in Baluchistan once stood was now a large bare patch which faced the spacious lawns and delightful garden and this important personage was living in an iron hut, the size of a glorified hen roost, which had been run up on one side of the lawns.

Then came the cantonment bazaar, a winding street of tin shanties, which sold most of the necessities of life, and a few of its luxuries. At the far end was what had been the edge of the native city; a more dreadful scene of desolation I have rarely seen. It lay like a running sore across the landscape where all was flat as a table; the debris having been cleared away but no fresh building begun.

Turning left over a bridge we moved up into the cantonment area which was a mass of deserted gardens, but as we drew farther away from the city a few buildings did appear. What, before the earthquake, had been Lourdes Hotel was still standing, though it looked as if it had undergone a severe bombardment where pieces of the main building had been torn away like an open doll's house, leaving the remains of bed and sitting rooms gaping in the strong sunlight.

The colonel explained that the deserted appearance of the cantonments was not so much due to the earthquake, as to a frenzy for destruction that had descended upon the authorities during which any bungalow that had shown definite signs of damage was promptly torn



down. In fact an orgy had taken place, in which light tanks and motor lorries had been employed, to carry out the work more swiftly and when it was all over it was found that only a small proportion of the money which was to have been spent on rebuilding was available. The result of this has been that, although two years have elapsed, little or no building had at that time been completed. Those living in cantonments do so, either in tin huts, or what are known as Wana huts. A Wana hut is a curious affair of four low mud walls, over which a roof of tent-canvas has been stretched, and they contain a tiny bathroom attached, a fireplace, and a floor space the size of a bathroom. In winter they are bitterly cold, and in summer so hot that they cannot be borne during the afternoon.

Our mess was a new building, run up in two days on the site of the old one, which, although a considerable distance from the city, had been badly shaken. A pleasant small building, it faced a large garden full of trees and flowers and on either side of it were long rows of Wana huts in which the officers lived. Enquiries as to whether I was to inhabit one of these rabbit hutches brought the reassuring news that it would not be necessary, as I had been given one half of a solitary bungalow standing at the far end of the garden.

After a meal in the mess I sought out my new abode, and found it pleasing enough though scarcely the acme of comfort, and in the garden at the back was a Wana hut in which I was expected to sleep at night. I decided to have none of it; if another earthquake occurred then I would be decently squashed in a proper bed, in a bedroom: but I always took the precaution of keeping a nearby door unlatched.

## (IV)

The battery quickly settled down in its new lines which, considering all things, were not at all bad. The animals, equipment, guns, and stores, taken over by our advance party from the departing one were, I am glad to say, in good condition and the harness and saddlery, a very important item, was excellent.

All too soon came 14 March when my battery died in childbirth. The new one was numbered 22, which gave me an idea. The number 2 in Hindustani is Do, with a hard 'o' like that in 'don't.' Hence 22 is Two Two, or Do Do. From this I ordered that the new battery's mascot and sign should be a Dodo. The fuss I had over that extinct bird was astonishing. Few people, in these days, seem to have heard of it, or to have read *Alice in Wonderland*, in which there is a delightful illustration of the Dodo. The reason for adopting such a strange creature had to be explained in detail, until I became tired of doing so, although it appeared clear enough.

Having a copy of *Alice* I asked a gunner-artist to make an enlarged drawing of the Dodo, and he did so most successfully, and a fine, upstanding bird it was, painted in the Gunner colours of blue and red. This was transferred to a battery flag and name board where people, as was to be expected, made rude remarks about the dead and defunct, but we did not mind. What my Indians thought of it in private I never knew, but the Indian officers when shown it, looked at it for a long time and then said it was beautiful; which was tactful, if not true.

Being newcomers to the station everyone who was able, and there were many, came to inspect us. Among the host, at the rate of three every week, was, first, the

G.O.C., then the brigade commander, doctors, ordnance officers, veterinary officers, engineers, remount officers, and last, but by no means least, an inspector of army catering from Army Headquarters. More of this personage later.

Those of us in the army, from the moment we join it, until we retire and fade away, are inoculated with inspections. Everyone, from the most junior N.C.O. to the Greatest of All the Great Ones, inspects how, and when, he can. There is no one so high that there is not someone just a little higher who will look-him-over if he can : even kings are not immune, for do not populations and governments inspect their kings ?

Inspections are very necessary in the army, but they can be shockingly overdone, and, let it be whispered, sometimes carried out for personal gain as well as military efficiency ; but that is a subject best left alone.

From long experience I have learned the art of carrying out inspections swiftly and surely and I gleaned it in a school where you pay in hard cash for neglect, or carelessness, in this matter. Each Saturday morning was devoted to inspections in the battery, starting at 10 a.m. and finishing about 12.30. The following is what I looked at, and not much missed my questing eye.

There were about twenty barrack rooms, both British and Indian. Here, the men, the beds, kits, floors, walls, boxes, and corners, were glanced at, and necessary repairs and suggestions noted. These were followed by the cookhouses, latrines, bath-houses, tailor's, shoemaker's, saddler's, fitter's, and shoeing-smith's shops and I saw one hundred and seventy-one sets of complicated harness, mostly laid out so that a glance would show the state it was in. From this came the gun parks with the guns, gun stores, ammunition, rifles, revolvers, and

the battery bicycle. When that was finished there came the animal lines, with the mules and horses, the grain stores, *bhoosa* dumps, and water troughs. The guard-room, light automatic store, recreation room, and dining-halls were taken in passing.

During the 'Progress' an assortment of people trailed behind. The battery captain, two subalterns, the sergeant-major, the quartermaster-sergeant, two Indian officers, a havildar major, and an orderly sergeant, besides others, who came and went as occasion called. I have expanded on these lists merely to show what a complicated thing a full battery of artillery can be. I was directly held responsible for the safe custody, and preservation, of every item of Government stores. If damage, or loss, took place, through neglect, or carelessness, then I was held financially to blame; this, of course, depending upon whether I was able to lie brazenly enough, or to shift the responsibility on to someone else. From this it will be seen that, only by careful supervision, can you save your pocket and your reputation. I have mentioned earlier in this book that if a *firearm* is stolen or lost, the trouble caused is out of all proportion to the monetary value.

Before those who really matter come to inspect the battery, I put into active operation what is known as 'Eyewash.' This is the laying-out, or preparing of, what is to be inspected, in the most alluring manner possible; and that means far more than having objects merely clean and serviceable; they must also be highly polished, or painted, or decorated, the idea being that the inspecting officer is so dazzled that he fails to see what is not meant for his eyes.

Most inspecting officers have their pet foibles, and this is especially so in the case of generals; therefore

it is wiser for those who are to be inspected to find out beforehand what the particular general in question will ask to see. It may be the men's boots that interest him most, or their food; the manner in which the guns are painted, or how the battery accounts are kept. One general I knew always looked into the men's latrines to see if there was sufficient toilet paper present, and it was woe to the major commanding the battery who missed this detail. The battery could otherwise be perfect, but that general departed in wrath and gloom to write reports which included remarks such as these: 'Lack of attention to detail. Poor administration. Failure to consider the comfort of his men.'

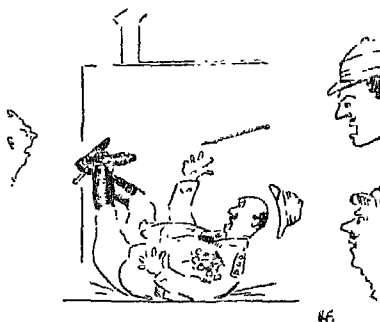
Here is a story of an inspection which took place in Quetta not so long ago.

The adjutant of our brigade was informed that an important personage, known as the Inspector of Army Catering, from Army Headquarters, was coming down to have a look at the brigade's messing arrangements. The day arrived and he turned out to be a full colonel, with a long row of medals and much majesty. He was, first of all, taken to the battery next door to ours, and here he told the major commanding the battery that he wished to see the cookhouse. With the colonel and the major leading, a procession was instantly formed, and it consisted of the captain, the battery messing officer, the quartermaster-sergeant, the sergeant-major, and the bombardier in charge of messing.

The N.C.O. in charge of the cookhouse had all prepared and ready. Spotless were the tables, implements, cupboards, pots, pans, and cooking dishes: speckless the white drill of the cook, assistant cooks, and helpers. Only one thing had been forgotten, as will be shown.

When the procession neared the cookhouse the sergeant-major leapt forward and flung open the fly-proof doors. The colonel was a large man, very large, and he had expanded in the region of his middle, and with dignified and gracious mien he stepped over the threshold of that cookhouse. Then, dare I write it? He trod on a grease spot, his legs flew from under him, and he crashed to the stone floor. The cookhouse rocked gently on its foundations, whilst cooks and lesser beings dashed to his aid, and dragged him to his feet. The major, I understand, kept his head during this crisis in an admirable manner, but the sergeant-major is reported to have been deeply shocked.

The battery waited with no little trepidation for the report on their messing from this inspector of catering.



An efficient inspecting officer must instantly treat with suspicion anything which is locked, enclosed from view, or otherwise hidden. "Open that box (or case, or door) at once," he says. The order is reluctantly obeyed, and a grisly secret is exposed. The inspecting officer may say nothing, but his manner clearly implies that it was just what he expected to find. Dirty looks are then passed downwards by the major, until they reach some unfortunate gunner, who is cursed until he dithers. Here is another story concerning an inspection, where something quite unexpected was found.

Not long ago, when in Malta, I was given one of the many forts to look after; but I knew little about it.

One day our local C.R.A., a full colonel, said he was going out to inspect the fort, and so everyone concerned was warned and the place prepared for the visitation. The colonel, a man lacking a sense of humour, was met at the fort gate by the usual cavalcade. He inspected the guns, stores, and ammunition, and other things where little comment was passed, and he was crossing the barrack square, on his way out of the fort, when his attention was attracted by a small square building in which were two doors. He wished to know for what purpose it was used, and on learning that one half was empty, but that a gunner in charge of stores lived in the other, he, guided by some evil influence, said he would look at it.

The right-hand door was flung open showing a tiny and empty room, but the left-hand door was locked. He now stated that most definitely he wished to see inside, and a pause followed whilst the gunner and the key were sought. In due course the gunner, very much out of breath, galloped on to the scene and opened the door. The full colonel, my own colonel, the adjutant, the gunner, and myself went inside. On the left was the usual bed and bedding, and, except for an aged magazine lying on the bed, and two cigarette ends on the floor, the room was clean and tidy. There was, however, a curious and pungent odour floating on the air.

On either side of the tiny fireplace were two cupboards let into the wall. The colonel went to the one on the left and flung it open, and we all saw that it held the personal kit of the gunner. Moving across to the other cupboard the inspecting officer attempted to open it, but it was tightly fitting. He gave the brass knob a strong pull and it flew open. The colonel stood perfectly still for a moment and then, with a choking gasp,

he stepped suddenly backwards and trod on our colonel's toes. The remainder of us crowded forward, looked, and registered various forms of emotion. There, lying alone, in all its state on the middle shelf, was a large and highly decomposed fish. The gas it gave off was almost tangible. I started to laugh, but changed my mind and hurried from the room, hastily followed by the remainder of the party.

The inspecting officer stood in the strong sunlight, without the glimmer of a smile on his face, and demanded an explanation. It was charmingly simple, and given by a now thoroughly alarmed gunner. A week or so previously, a Maltese fisherman, whom he had befriended, had come up from the rocks and sea below the fort and made him a present of the fish. The gunner had put it in the cupboard, gone away, and forgotten its existence.

That, however, was not the end. I was ordered forward and told that it was highly reprehensible, and that I must punish the unfortunate gunner.

(v)

The new lot of mules taken over from the other battery were in excellent condition, which was partly accounted for by their not having done any work for five months. They were very wild, and only one or two out of one hundred and forty-three would allow me, or any white man, to go near them, let alone handle them. Seeing me draw close, a mule would turn his head in my direction, put forward his ears, and then blow at me while straining at his heel-ropes to get as far away as possible.

I tried coaxing them with small lumps of native sugar



and this was amusing, because they became torn between their love of the sweetmeat and their loathing of me. The sugar generally won, but not always. Approaching a mule I would hold out my hand showing the light brown lump on my palm. The animal would cautiously stretch out his neck in my direction and blow, then away his head would go as if my scent was too frightful to be borne, but remembering the sugar, back came the muzzle, blowing like a grampus. This performance was kept up for several moments, after which the sugar was very greedily snatched, and eaten with deep satisfaction. In spite of this I was never allowed to take liberties, such as patting a neck, or tickling a soft muzzle. That was only permitted after much sugar, and doubtless I should have expended hundredweights before all the animals became accustomed to me. One or two would have none of me, or the sugar, and made it quite plain that, dearly would they have liked to bite me. Instead, they turned, with bad tempered squeals, and nipped their nearest companion, who, in return, gave as good as he received.

But a well-bred, upstanding, mountain battery mule is a fine beast. He has so much more character than a horse, and takes a greater interest in what is going on round about him. Bring something unusual into the lines and every animal will turn its head and ears in the correct direction, and they have a good look at whatever it happens to be. Their attitude says plainly : " Good gracious ! What on earth is that ? " Few horses show this interest.

Mules are easy to keep in condition, and are not often sick or sorry, they must, however, have good water and a well-fitting saddle. They will eat anything, even the hairs from a companion's tail, and many are the stories connected with this shocking greediness. A young

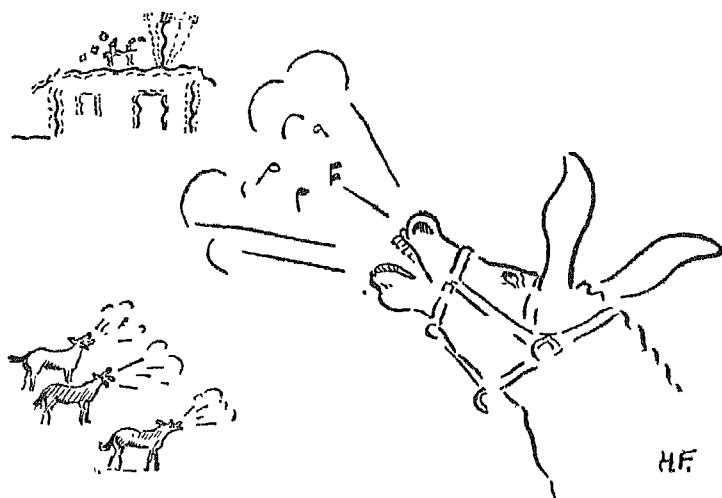
subaltern, unused to the ways of mules, discovered one cold night that the mule rugs had been left behind. He ordered saddle blankets to be put on the animals in place of the rugs and the following morning not a sign of a blanket remained, not one single strand, and saddle blankets are not cheap, as that subaltern quickly found out.

A British gunner one evening hung his greatcoat up in the stables, and, going away, forgot that he had done so. When he remembered the following day he returned to collect his coat, but all he found were the brass buttons. The mule, within whose reach the coat had been, found the buttons hurt his teeth.

It is diverting to be in the lines at feed time where a stranger would imagine, from the yelling and braying taking place, that each mule was starving. As feed time draws close, not only do they use their voices, but they swish their tails, and bite each other in excited anticipation.

In India mules are not given hay, but *bhoosa* instead, and this resembles very pale yellow chopped straw, and it has always been a source of wonder to me how the animals manage to extract any nourishment from it. Before I left the battery we were ordered to feed our twenty-two horses on a proportion of *bhoosa* in lieu of hay (another act of meanness on the part of the Government). At first the horses would not touch it, but when craftily damped with sweetened water they ate it readily enough.

During a long, hot, drowsy afternoon a mule will suddenly think of love, and all that he has missed. Raising his head he will send out that heartrending complaint which can shake the ground beneath his feet. This reminds the other animals, and a short, sharp hurricane



of braying takes place: but they are all unfortunate brothers together, and presently return to the ever-present *bhoosa*.

On steep hill-sides a mule is almost as clever on his feet as a goat and he will, on occasion, leap from boulder to boulder when carrying his huge load, but he does not like doing it.

In the Murree Hills I once saw a mule slip over the edge of a mountain path whose edges had been weakened by heavy rains. That mule was carrying the two wheels and axle of a gun, but tucking his head between his forelegs he rolled and bounced down the steep sides of a *gali*. Bits of gun and saddlery flew off like bullets, followed by the two gun wheels which took off and tried to fly, going down the *gali* in bounds of fifty feet. At the bottom, about seven hundred feet, the mule got to his feet, shook himself, and began to graze, when he should have been food for vultures. One wheel was reduced to matchwood.

Again in these hills, long afterwards, I witnessed a

case of what definitely appeared to be suicide. My section had been out on a long day's work and was returning homewards when on a narrow path, whose side fell almost sheer for two thousand feet, a mule suddenly, and for no apparent reason, began to make a scene. I halted the section, and, myself, went to the driver's aid where he was hanging on to the reins and struggling with the animal which was backing towards the edge of the path. I caught hold of his head collar and tried to sooth the mule, but no, he flung up his head and deliberately went on backing. His hind legs slipped over the edge, even so he could have saved himself had he wished, but he left the reins in our hands and fell to his death.

It was several hours before the overheated and very blasphemous Gunners reached his remains, because the saddlery and gun parts had, if possible, to be recovered. By then all that the vultures had left of that mule were his bones ; they had even picked the stuffing out of the saddle panels.

The death of that animal took a good deal of explaining to the major, on my return ; and, at first, he frankly disbelieved my story.

There is a soft corner in my heart for the ' old brown mule.' May he end up as Professor Weigall once said, ' On the Isles of the Blessed where the souls of righteous beasts of burden pass their days in great contentment, feeding and drowsing.'

## CHAPTER VII

(1)

TWO miles farther on, beyond our mess in Quetta, at the end of a long and gently sloping road, is a large, solid building with a clock tower, which was not damaged by the earthquake. This is the Staff College, the second half of all military knowledge, and from which the frivolous recoil as the Devil from sanctity. As a humble seeker after enlightenment, to pass through its portals is, in the end, to be given those magic letters P.S.C. after your name. Those who Pass the Staff College do not need to fear for the future and they may marry and have broods of children, for promotion and fat jobs are theirs for life, unless of course they assault an army commander, or are found drunk in the gutter. P.S.C. carries more weight with the military mind than the fact of having been to Eton, and that is not a little.

The Staff College is filled with earnest young men, who come in relays every two years, and they are made up of those who possess the capacity for absorbing and retaining, for a short while, an undigested mass of information needed to qualify at the entrance examination. The result of this is, as a rule, a type of one particular breed. Selected candidates are always supposed to be first-class regimental officers. Dare I query if this is always the case?

The students sit at the feet of still more earnest

teachers, and they suck up higher military knowledge as dry sponges do water. From classrooms and lecture-halls they learn to handle army corps, divisions, and brigades. How this is done I do not know, never having been to this college; but there is no doubt that it does happen, because I saw it when an unwilling assistant in one of the larger Staff College exercises.

Carried on the crest of a flood of paper I was swept out into that strange country which lies to the north of Quetta where we regimental officers had been dragged in to fill the less important gaps in a Staff College exercise. I was supposed to be the commander of a brigade of artillery attached to an infantry brigade, which formed part of a division, which in turn was part of an army corps advancing through enemy country. The students took the part of the higher commanders and their staffs and I was interested to see how a junior captain would handle a division, or a brigade; one student was even a corps commander. To my simple mind, expecting these officers merely to act as the staff, was asking very highly of them; but I soon learned the reason why they were able to compete with their seemingly overpowering responsibilities.

For the first twenty-four hours I had nothing to do, because the brigade which I was supposed to be commanding was away behind the line in reserve. (No actual troops being involved in this exercise.) When informed that my brigade had been brought into action I sat up and tried to command it. Imagination has, very necessarily, to play a large part in operations of this kind, because there was no actual enemy; he existed only on paper.

I think I have an active imagination when I care to use it, besides experience of active service conditions,

but within an hour of handling my brigade an indignant C.R.A. (Commanding Royal Artillery of a division) sought me out and said I was not playing fairly ; I was, in fact, making things too difficult for him. He further intimated that he considered I was being bloody minded. Before a divisional commander, several brigade commanders, and an amused circle of staff officers, that C.R.A. and I had a row. It was short, sharp, and furious, and more than sprinkled with personal abuse, and the result was that my brigade was cast back into reserve, and I was again left with nothing to do : however, the role of spectator was not without considerable interest.

I was soon filled with admiration for these young commanders, because whatever else the Staff College may lack, it most certainly owns the capacity for being able to make people work, and at high speed. What had been from the beginning a suspicion in my mind now became a certainty : this was to be a paper war, and he who produced the most paper won.

Dotted about in small groups over many square miles of country, and connected to each other by miles of telephone cable, were divisional and brigade commanders and their staffs. Everyone, brigade commanders, brigade majors, staff captains, and all the rest, who could snatch a piece of paper, wrote madly ; they wrote almost continuously for two days. They lived in a snow-storm of telegraph forms, and a hurricane of reports, and it is an actual fact that many of these commanders were so busy scribbling that they forgot to carry on the battle. The reader will, naturally, wish to know what they wrote. They reported and wrote diaries, but what was said in them I do not know ; but as far as I could gather it was a case of someone reported to someone else, who



reported to them, and so they had to report in their turn, and note the fact that they had done so in their diaries. They also pored over maps on which they made strange marks with red and blue pencils.

Now and again, just to relieve the monotony, and to rest their tired wrists, the students were made to scramble to a hill-top and make a decision in connection with the battle. It was then long discussions took place in which it was rare for anyone to agree with anyone else.

When all was over, the paper nearly exhausted, and the enemy thoroughly beaten (he always is), all the telegrams, reports, and diaries were collected, and we went home.

It took the teachers at the Staff College many days to absorb all that had been written, but when they were ready they called a conference, to which I, and others, were bidden. The large hall of the college was crowded when I arrived, a little late. On one side sat the very senior officers, blazing in red, and facing the platform were rows and rows of students, each wearing a somewhat



strained look ; but it was not until the following day, and in secret, that they were told what was really thought of them, and their work, on the occasion of which I have spoken.

There was no room for me to sit down, so I stood by a mantelpiece and grinned at one of the teachers who was more human than some of them. I gazed over those rows of keen young soldiers and was sorry for them. For two long years they would slave just to become typical staff officers, such as I shall mention when I come to talk about my time on the staff. Yes. I did sink so low, but when the reasons are considered I think they will be thought adequate. The sight saddened me, especially as I knew, and liked, several of them, because they were still only a little affected by the change which was creeping over them.

After the conference (which was very dull) was over, I went home and destroyed a wad of paper an inch and a half thick. I wonder how much the students had collected ?

(II)

Quetta cantonment has more water running through it than any other place I know, except perhaps Peshawar. The water comes from a large spring in the hills some distance to the north and it is guided into channels and distributed over the cantonment area, where every road has a miniature stream on one side or the other. Each day of the week the water is led off into selected gardens, where it flows on to the flower-beds and lawns, and floods them. It is diverting to watch the *mali* (gardener) rushing from one water channel to another, in a large garden, as he blocks this one, or opens that. He has to be quick because the time that the water is

allowed to flow is limited, and if the garden is extensive the distribution has to be carefully watched.

The one facing my bungalow was filled with almond, cherry, apricot, and peach trees, and when they were in full bloom the spectacle was enchanting, seen against the snow-covered mountains. Most of the English flowers were there, but they had been allowed to run riot and so were small in size.

Some distance from our mess, and on the far side of cantonments, under the shadow of Murdar, the 10,000 feet mountain, were the grounds in which the new and permanent mess is to be built and which had been a garden for many years, but was neglected. Among us we were fortunate in having an officer who was not only very keen on flowers, but one with excellent taste and an appreciation of the beautiful. He put in a great deal of thought and work on this new garden, with the result that it soon became a show place, and was, when I knew it, very nearly like a lovely English one.

On the left of the entrance was a long, high, and curving rock-garden which was a blaze of spring flowers. Daffodils, narcissi, wallflowers, and violets were there in profusion, and out of them sprang gorgeous bushes of white and dark purple lilac, but in April it was really at its best, when the home flowers, from hollyhocks to lobelia, were in full bloom. Facing the rock-garden was a wide lawn surrounded by tall, shady trees, some of which were flowering, whilst a stream ran along one side of the lawn, and on its deep banks were flags, lilies, and deep green grasses. Tucked away at the far end, beyond the lawn, were three rose-gardens, where the trees appeared to compete with each other in the number and sizes of the blooms they produced. The garden was strewn with masses of tea roses, and ramblers of all

shades, which cascaded from their various supports, and among them was a sulphur-yellow, single rose of particular charm, whose fallen petals resembled a patch of sunlight which had strayed.

To sit in the late afternoon on the lawn under the trees was to be in southern England on a late June day. The air was fragrant with various sweet perfumes; the sound of bees and insects working at full pressure, and, as a background, the faint rustle from the running water in the stream.

Not fifty yards away, on the far bank of the stream, but mainly hidden by the trunks of trees and bushes, began an arid, dirty-yellow, and stony plain, on which nothing grew; and which stretched away to become lost in the foot of the mountains. The contrast was fantastic, and left many of our visitors speechless.

When my morning's work had led down paths strewn with stones of offence, I would, after tea, leave my bungalow, get on my bicycle and go down and wander in our garden. My thoughts flew across the seas to another, and more lovely garden, which I knew down in Dorset and I counted the days until I should see it again, but among the sweet-scented stocks, larkspur, sweet peas, columbine, and yellow daisies, a peace settled on my ruffled soul.

Our garden, however, was man-made, as opposed to one guided by a woman's hand, and the main difference lay in a certain lack of discrimination which had taken place in the past, but Captain Battye, our gardener, wisely did not attempt to change this too quickly. There was no massing, or blending of colours, but rather a tendency to plant whatever came to hand, wherever there happened to be space for it. Both types of garden have their own charms, but I have a tidy

mind which tends towards the more formal. Wall-flowers and snapdragons, for example, do not in my opinion make good bedfellows.

Gardening in India is a depressing business, unless you are definitely settled in one spot for a considerable time, because bungalows change hands so frequently that the plants are bound to suffer. One occupant will be keen on his garden, and he that follows will allow it to fall into ruin. In some stations, Peshawar for instance, there are garden competitions, which do a great deal to arouse enthusiasm. Indian gardeners need encouragement and guidance far more than do their brothers at home, and if you expect them to work entirely alone, then trouble will result.

Flowers in any quantity in a small garden in India have one disadvantage, in that they do attract most horrid hornets, who build beautiful, cup-like nests of wax on the beams of the nearest veranda. They are highly suspicious and quick-tempered, some breeds attacking in mass formation if disturbed; there were many on my tiny veranda, and highly temperamental they were. There was one enormous and solitary hornet, decorated with chocolate and yellow bands, who was building her nest above a flower-bed against one of the outside walls, and whenever I came near to pluck a flower she came for me and I hastily retired. She was good enough to warn me by making dashes at my head, and so I was never stung, but she was truly fearsome to look at.

### (III)

An ordeal to be faced when serving with Indian troops is that known as an Indian Officer's Tea Party. These parties are given at the slightest excuse, and

elaborately worded invitations are sent out, and a few, if not all, must be accepted.

The Indian officers, in a unit of any size, have their own club, which often consists of two single rooms facing a small courtyard. Here there are a few tables, and deck-chairs, and many gaudy-coloured paper streamers festooning the walls where there is probably a portrait of the King, and also of some of the Royal Family. It is in these clubs that the parties are held.

On arrival, the hosts, in gleaming white clothes, and splendidly wound turbans, greet you with solemn politeness, but if you are wise you do not arrive too early, or alone. Should this happen then you are seated in a deck-chair, and the hosts, sometimes a dozen or more, sit and regard you, and offer cigarettes. Before crossing the threshold your brain may have prepared a dozen topics of conversation, but the sight of those Indian officers sitting and waiting for you to begin turns off the conversational tap with a brutal suddenness. You search for something suitable to say. You comment on the weather, and the charm of your present surroundings; and your hosts lean forward and drink in the words as if they were drops of nectar, their manner implying that you, the Heaven Born, are wiser than many sages, and that the greatest benefit you can bestow on them is to continue.

At last another guest, or guests, arrive. When all have gathered you are led into the other room, or out on to the veranda, where tea is laid, and waiting. It resembles those village teas which are given in the church hall at home. A long table is covered with a coarse white tablecloth, the crockery is decorated with pink roses and, in a long line down the middle of the table, are plates of fruit, flamboyant cakes, nuts, and bread and butter.

Each guest has an Indian officer on either side of him, and agitated orderlies now bring round weak tea, or shoo away the flies. You are pressed to accept milk, sugar, and food.

The following is typical of the conversation which now takes place in Hindustani.

“ Well, Subadar sahib, and what is the news from your home ? Is all well there ? ”

“ Yes, Huzoor (prince), all is good. But no rain has come.”

There follows a pause during which you nibble a piece of bread and butter.

“ When do you go on leave, Subadar sahib ? ”

“ I do not know. Perhaps after three months. But there is much work here. It is the Colonel sahib’s pleasure.”

“ Well, sahib, I am sure you deserve leave.”

The Subadar smiles, but says nothing, and instead presses you to eat sugared cakes of violent colourings.

“ No, thank you, sahib. I rarely eat anything at tea.”

A long pause follows and you listen to the conversational efforts of your brother-officers opposite, also, to help to pass the time, you accept more weak tea. Every time you catch the eyes of an Indian officer across the table he smiles politely.

An hour passes as if it were a snail with bad corns. The hosts eat largely, and with Oriental appreciation, but the end is now in sight. Whiskies and sodas are handed round, and there is much raising of glasses ; but the hosts drink lemonade, or other mineral waters of horrific colourings. If there are Sikhs present they will, sometimes, drink whisky ; the others accept cigarettes which they smoke in the usual Oriental fashion. Cigarettes are never put to the lips, but held between two

fingers of one hand, and the smoke inhaled through the opening between the index finger and thumb of a closed fist.

The senior guest moves on his chair and you know that delivery is at hand. All the guests get to their feet, and, with many expressions of thanks, depart in a body. Another tea-party is past ; but there will be plenty more in the future.

(IV)

The adjutant came into the mess before luncheon one morning, saw me, and grinned a nasty, suggestive grin. I knew what that meant.

"Well, what is it this time?" I enquired, prepared for the worst. "Another beastly court of enquiry? Or is it an audit board?"

"Something much worse," replied the adjutant. "You're detailed as a member of a general court martial to be held up in Chaman. And a pretty sticky one it is going to be, as far as I can gather. A case of mutiny, and they have got four accused, all Indian N.C.O.s."

"Oh, Lord," I groaned. "I would fall for something like that. How long will it last?"

"Days and days I expect. I hear that there are ninety sheets of evidence and there's an Indian lawyer going to defend."

This really was too much of a good thing, because I knew full well how awful an Indian lawyer, who does not understand military law, can be. I had another gin to help me face this shock, and then felt better. On second thoughts it was not as bad as it might have been. The tiny cantonment of Chaman lay very close to the Afghanistan border, some seventy miles north of Quetta, and it was a place I had never visited, and had always

wished to do ; this would give me an opportunity of sightseeing.

In due course, with my bearer squeezed in beside my kit in the back of an army motor car, and myself sitting beside the young Indian driver, we set out to cross the Khojak Pass in the range of mountains which lies between Quetta and the frontier of Afghanistan. It was to prove an interesting, as well as an alarming, journey.

The road led out of Quetta Cantonments by way of the vast and straggling supply and transport lines, and started to cross a flat, light brown, dusty plain whose surface was deeply scarred with dry watercourses. Gradually a long spur, from the brown hills on the right of the road, swept forward so that the road skirted its point, and rounding it we came upon what was almost a bottle-neck, because another line of hills had closed in from the far side of the plain. It was at this spot, in the old days, where it was considered an enemy using the Khojak Pass could be most easily held, and as a result the hill-sides were dotted with ancient gun positions.

The bottle-neck gradually opened out and a fairly well-watered piece of country came into view, with its orchards and fields of green corn. Then, quite suddenly, the oddest kind of landscape took its place, which had obviously once been the bed of a deep lake, or inland sea. Down the ages the wind and the rain had washed away much of the softer portions of the bed, leaving clusters of miniature and rounded hills, with winding valleys in between them. The colour of these hills was vivid and unusual, where layers of pink, rose-pink, bright red, yellow, lemon colour, and even white, were placed one on top of the other not unlike certain forms of cake, except that the layers were by no means straight, but twisted into graceful geological curves.



There appeared to be no method about these hills, for they were dotted about the country with considerable distances between the groups.

Beyond this another plain opened up and stretched into the far and misty distance, where I could just make out the line of hills over which we must pass. This plain was quite flat, and there was one tree to every ten square miles, but although it lacked vegetation the same cannot be said of animal life. There were thousands of goats, fat-tailed sheep, donkeys, camels, and even flocks of lambs, many of which considered the road a fit and proper place on which to take their ease. On rounding a bend in the coloured hills we would come upon a huge flock of goats and sheep, who fled from the road like spilled water at our yelling approach; but the camels were the worst offenders, because they would not remove themselves from our path until the last moment. On more than one occasion I had visions of a large, hairy, and smelly beast draping itself on our radiator, but just as contact was to be made away they galumphed, with all four legs going in different directions, wearing pained and thoroughly indignant looks on their faces.

It was now the driver first showed indications of what was to come by crossing the plain at fifty miles an hour, but as the road was good, and straight, I did not complain. Side by side with the railway we entered the hills and began our climb to the Khojak Pass, which rises to 7500 feet and drops 3000 to the Chaman Plain on the far side.

The mountains were wild, dark brown, and incredibly broken and torn, and the road, as is generally the case with the lower passes, wound steeply up one side of a wide *nullah* which steadily grew deeper and deeper as it cut into the hill-sides, which were composed of loose

shale. The road had no protecting outer wall, and was just wide enough for two medium-sized cars to pass each other. The curves and corners were hair-raising, made worse by the fact that, as we were using the right-hand side of the *nullah*, the outer edge was the correct side of the road. Most of the corners were taken on the wrong side with a twisting and wrenching of the steering-wheel which sickened me, and not once, but fifty times I saw us hurtling down into that menacing *nullah*. By the time we reached the crest of the pass I was in a state of dither; but it was nothing to what was to come.

The view that burst upon us at the gap was magnificent, where, 3000 feet below, the Chaman Plain, a pale, yellow-green haze, stretched away to the hills of Afghanistan, and in the middle I could just make out the cantonment as a darker green patch. It was a considerable thrill to see those ragged hills of Afghanistan for the first time, and I thought of all the concentrated wickedness that they must hold.

The downward course was made on a wider and better road and, in consequence, the driver drove like a mad-dened Jehu, taking hair-pin bends on two wheels, with a screeching of tyres, and a hideous din from the electric horn. I told the Indian to slow down and he did so for two corners, but soon we were careering as madly as before. The man seemed blissfully unaware of the fearful drops, and terrifying boulder-strewn *nullahs*, into which we could so easily have fallen, and it never entered his head what might happen should we run into a flock of sheep, or meet another car. In spite of this passion for speed he was a skilful driver.

With a prayer of thanks on my lips we came at last to the cantonments. The mess in which all the members of the court martial were to live was that of the 2nd Sikhs

12th Frontier Force Regiment, which was then in the Old Dak Bungalow on the Mall ; for Chaman had also been shaken in the earthquake, and many of the bungalows had suffered the same fate as those in Quetta. It was late when I arrived, and the ante-room crowded with men I did not know, but instantly I was made to feel at home, hospitality being pressed on me from all sides. Eventually I remained in that mess for fourteen days, and never have I been so well looked after ; everything for my comfort was thought of, and nothing was too much trouble. How rare it is to be treated with this consideration in another mess, and how pleasant to be able to record it.

Everyone lived in a Wana hut, except the colonel and one or two others, and so, naturally, I was given one of these unpleasant abodes. It was comfortably furnished, but I was to share it with several other living things who resented my intrusion, one of which was a large, yellow scorpion in the bathroom, but he soon messily departed. Large black ants came to inspect me, and fat beetles tried to share my bed. One night when reading I became aware that something with many legs was walking up my back under the pyjama coat, and so leaping out of bed in a panic I shook myself violently. Not one, but two, fat beetles the size of a sixpence fell to the floor and scuttled indignantly away. I carefully inspected that bed in future before getting into it.

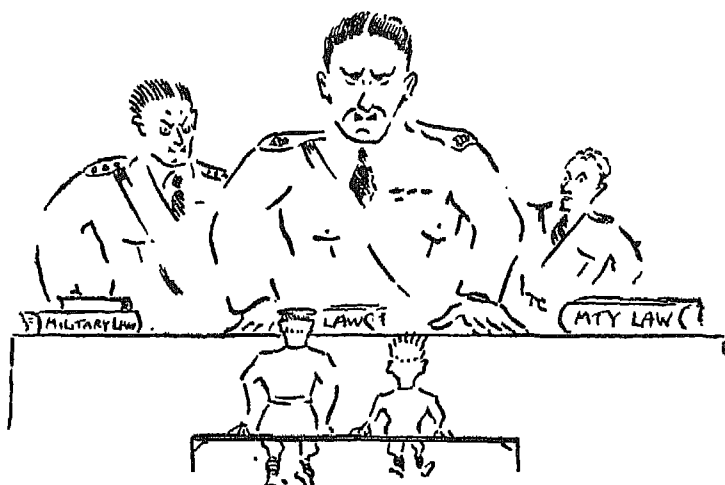
The following morning the colonel of the Sikhs, who was president of the court martial, called for me in his car, and we set out for a fort three miles away. The court was to sit in what was an Indian soldier's school-room, which was quite unlovely, and hung with maps and strange pictures which showed portions of the human form, and others depicting English life of forty years ago.

One was a scene on the platform of a railway station, and I wondered who could have drawn a thing so lifeless and artificial. How well I came to know that room; every detail of it stands out in my mind, even at this distance of time.

Gradually all those connected with the court collected. There were the colonel, two majors, two captains, and one lieutenant, as members; a captain who was prosecuting, another defending, a major as an interpreter, a captain from the Adjutant-General's department, who was the legal expert, and finally, the Indian lawyer who was defending two of the accused.

Here are a few details concerning a court martial which may be of interest, because they are not generally known.

A military court martial closely resembles a civil criminal court, where there is the usual prosecution and defence, both represented by officers. For comparatively minor cases the actual court itself consists of a major



as president, a captain, and a lieutenant, but in serious or difficult cases a very senior officer is the president, and there may be up to six or eight members of the rank of major and captain; also there is an army legal expert present, known as a Judge-Advocate, whose duty it is to direct the court on points of military law and procedure.

The members of the court are a combination of judge and jury, who are sworn to try the accused without 'partiality, favour, or affection.' In every case the court is on the side of the accused, and in cases of reasonable doubt he is always given the benefit of that doubt. I was president, not so long ago, on a very serious case, the whole of which turned mainly on whether a man was, or was not, wearing a certain kind of hat. Everybody present felt sure that the accused was guilty of the charge, but the prosecution failed to prove the hat question, and so the man went free, in spite of an accumulation of other evidence.

When all the evidence for both sides has been heard and taken down in writing the court room is closed and cleared of all except the members, who now consider their finding. The president sums up, and the most junior member is asked, first, what his opinion is. Is the accused Guilty, or Not Guilty? The next senior is then asked, and so on. If the members are divided, then the matter is talked out as is the case with juries. Should the court still remain divided then the president gives a casting vote.

If a finding of not guilty on all charges is recorded, the accused is told so in open court and released. On a finding of guilty on one or more of the charges, the court is re-opened, and the officer who is prosecuting produces evidence as to character, good or bad. The

court is again closed and the members consider the sentence in the same manner as the finding.

The proceedings are then sent up to army legal experts, who if they find some flaw can, and often do, quash the whole case, and the accused goes free. Certain general officers are permitted to reduce a sentence, but never, except in India, to increase it, and this is the reason why a sentence of a court martial is never divulged until it has been what is known as 'confirmed,' and it may take as long as fourteen days in difficult cases.

The court, of which I was a member, in Chaman, concerned four Indian N.C.O.s who were accused of conspiring together to cause a mutiny in a small unit. The alleged ring-leader was a senior N.C.O. who was also a holy man. (A kind of padre.) His conduct having been found to be thoroughly unsatisfactory, his commanding officer decided to discharge him from the army and this started the trouble, for the N.C.O. had used his religious powers to influence the men of his company.

Between eighty and ninety men one morning formed up outside the commanding officer's orderly room, and demanded to see the general, as they wished to make complaints, in an endeavour to have the commanding officer removed. When eventually ordered to dismiss and to return to their barrack rooms, they refused to do so, and this constituted mutiny. When enquiries were made, it was found that the senior N.C.O., together with others, had worked out this plan to be revenged for his discharge.

In the normal course of events this trial should not have taken more than five days; actually it lasted fourteen, and this was the reason. The army legal expert was a pleasant little man, but his method of directing the procedure of the court was pedantic. He insisted that

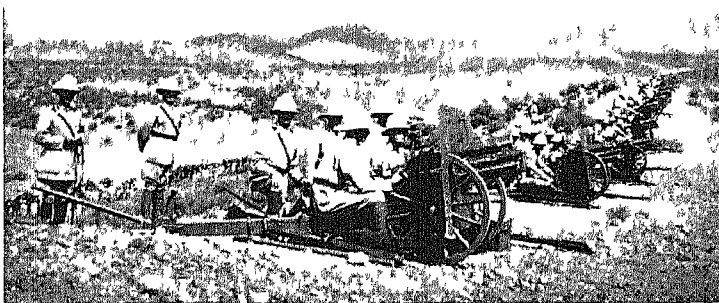
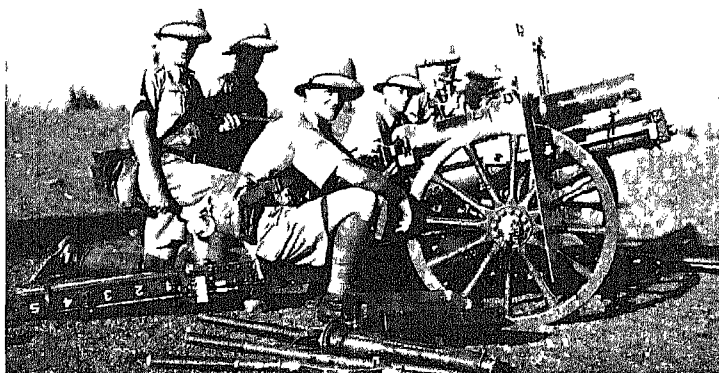
every scrap of evidence should be heard five times. Here is one example.

The prosecuting officer addressed a question in English to a witness. This was translated into Hindustani by the interpreter and the witness gave his reply. This was translated into English and written down by the legal expert. The legal expert then read out in English what he had written down, and this was again translated to the witness, who was asked if it was correct. After all the questions to the witness had been asked, answered, and written down, the whole evidence was handed to the interpreter who once again translated it to the witness who then agreed that it was correct. A more frightful proceeding it is difficult to imagine. All that was actually required was for the questions and answers to be written down and then, finally, read over to the witness.

To add to our misery and boredom, there was the Indian lawyer for the defence. This man was paid a large sum by two of the accused ; and to give him his dues he certainly tried to earn it, by asking innumerable questions and displaying a lack of knowledge of military law. Time and again half an hour would be wasted whilst the legal expert and this Indian had a verbal battle over something which had no real bearing on the case. I consider the president of the court was too indulgent. I would have suppressed that legal expert and squashed the lawyer in the first hour, if I had been given a chance.

The court opened at 9.15 each morning, sat until 12.30 and reopened again at 2 p.m. and closed for the day at 4.30. It was very hot, and never have I been so bored. I learned, however, to write well with my left hand, and I killed many flies.

The accused were not impressive, but never did men



# THE OLD BRITISH MOUNTAIN ARTILLERY

(Top) A gun detachment  
(Bottom) A brigade in action





have a fairer trial. Two of the four were found guilty and received heavy sentences, because the crime of mutiny in the Indian Army is a very serious one.

Since the Great Mutiny in 1857 no Indian regiment, other than Gurkhas, is composed of any one class. For example, a Sikh regiment may be so called, but its class composition may consist of Sikhs, Pathans, and Rajputs. The idea behind this is, that if there is trouble brewing one class will certainly give away the other and the matter become known. In our case the men were all of one caste and came from the same district.

(v)

Chaman is old, and dates back to the time when we first took over Baluchistan. Actually Baluchistan is not a part of the Indian Empire, but a kind of protectorate, and the importance of Chaman lies in the fact that it is the present end of the railway, and, from this point onwards, lies the only feasible line of advance upon Kandahar. Equally, of course, it is a line for an enemy to descend upon Quetta, and by the Bolan Pass into India proper. Stacked in the numerous railway sidings is a great mass of railway construction material, enough to complete the line as far as Kandahar, and which has lain there for many years.

The frontier lies two miles from cantonments, and is marked by white stones placed half a mile apart, and the road to Kandahar passes through cantonments to the frontier post three miles away. Within easy reach of Chaman is the small fortress of Spin Baldak in which the Afghans keep a permanent garrison. It is situated on a low hill which rises out of the plain and overlooks our lines.

During the season vast quantities of fruit pass down from the plains of Kandahar to the railhead, where it is brought in motor lorries, there entrained, and sent down to be sold as far away as Calcutta.

If an officer, or European, accidentally crosses the frontier he is sure to be hunted, and, if caught, flung into durance vile in Spin Baldak, and we have the trouble of getting him out, although we freely allow unlimited numbers of Afghans to come and go in the Chaman bazaar. Therein lies our astonishing self-complacency which so infuriates the smaller nations.

Two Indian regiments and small auxiliary services are stationed in the cantonments. Fortunately the two regiments at present in the station are first-class ones, and the officers get on extremely well together, but it can readily be understood what an unpleasant state of affairs might exist if this were not the case.

The cantonment area is tiny, a small, vivid, green oasis in the middle of the semi-barren, stony, yellow plain, and it is surrounded by heavy barbed-wire entanglements, in which there are a few gates which are kept closed and guarded by night. There is only one main road, the Mall, and most of the bungalows are on, or close to it, and in spring it is extremely pretty with charming gardens, filled with large green trees in which mulberries figure prominently. There are flowers of all kinds, including a tiny wild iris which turns portions of the Mall into lovely paths of bluish purple, set in the soft green grass of the roadside. It ended with the gate in the barbed-wire, but the road continued past the bazaar to a fort three miles away, there, branching to the left, it goes on to Kandahar.

Lieutenant Colonel Pearson, who commanded the 2nd Sikhs, was a keen horseman, and kindly offered me

one of his animals to ride. I gratefully accepted and it was arranged that the mare should be brought round to my quarters after tea.

"She's a wonderful old mare," said the colonel. "You would never believe that she is twenty-three. She's done most things in her life, and is still full of beans."

Twenty-three years in comparison to human life is in the region of eighty-five, and I wondered what sort of apparition would appear. When the old lady was brought round I was astounded at her fine condition, and she actually did not look more than ten years of age. Getting on to her back I decided that she must be treated gently, and that a little mild trotting to shake up my liver was all that I could expect of her.

That mare was as vain as a peacock, and she showed off her paces as soon as we left the mess compound, and during an hour's ride she never walked one single step. Her main desire was to show me how fast, and how far, she could go, and when restrained she jogged, crab-walked, and danced on her toes. When allowed to trot she tried to snatch the bit from me, but soon gave that up as hopeless. On that ride she behaved as if she were four, and on the way home she crab-trotted the whole way. My liver was in excellent form when I slid from her back.

When she realized that she could not have her own way she behaved like the perfect lady she was and we had many a pleasant evening together. When riding on the plain, between the railway and the frontier, we would come upon the tents of the nomad shepherds, or pass the time of day with a thin and withered ancient, or a young boy, who tended the large flocks of goats and sheep.

The tents were in groups of seven or eight, and closely resembled gigantic black slugs, both in colour and shape. The ground was dug out to a depth of two feet, and the rough, black canvas, made of goat's hair, was stretched over half-hoops of wood, making the roof and walls all in one piece. Each held a family consisting of parents, grandparents, children of all ages, and the children's wives; fowls and dogs also shared the dwelling. At one group of tents I became friendly with one young, cheerful lad, and we conversed in Hindustani whilst he smoked my cigarettes. Two young women, dressed in bright red trousers and yellow shawls, would creep near and watch me with bright and shining eyes, and one was comely, but something of a hussy. Her large eyes were expressive, and in them I read all that she wished me to read, and each time I slid from the back of the mare she would appear and stand well apart, whilst her companion suckled a baby and giggled in a suggestive manner.

Each group of tents owned a pack of large dogs who were a confounded nuisance, because on my approach they would tear out towards me making the air hideous with their furious barking. They made dashes at the mare's hind quarters, but never came close enough to do more than make me nervous. A small brat, using curses and stones, usually drove them off.

Sometimes the mare and I would pick our way through the acres of neatly packed rails and sleepers in the railway sidings, but she did not care for the huge girders, painted red, which were to be bridges; nor did she relish the sudden appearance of minute donkeys who had been grazing on the grass between the stacks. From here we made our way past the two large reserve reservoirs, in which the station bathed in the hot weather,

and so out on to the plain which was without interest. Once in this area we found ourselves on what was obviously the local golf course, but anything less like one I have rarely seen, where the greens were patches of sand and the course the open plain.

Chaman bazaar, which lay outside the barbed-wire, was small and not very interesting, but its main road, during the early evening, was crowded with tall, hairy Afghans, from across the frontier. They swaggered up and down as if they owned the place, and from the expressions on their faces I knew they were filled with devilry and a very great sinfulness. They regarded me as those at Jumrud had done.

On the corner of the bazaar road was a tiny empty shack with a deep veranda, above which was a sign stating that it was once Brown's Library. It was falling into ruin, and now the abode of Chaman Charlie.

Chaman Charlie was a very unpleasant person, who was mad, quite naked, and very dirty. About forty years old, his dusty, brown body was well nourished, and his head covered with a filthy mop of hair. He either lay naked in the sun on the dust of the roadside; or sat among his rags in a corner of the veranda and sought for lice; I have seldom seen a monkey who was more proficient in this occupation.

I am not sure whether Charlie was as mad as he pretended to be, but it meant a lazy, care-free existence, in which, because he was afflicted of Allah, everyone treated him kindly and, above all, fed him well.

The bazaar itself was filled with dust, smells, garbage, and the usual small, open-fronted shops. One evening I stood for several minutes close to a general merchant's shop. Squatting on the wooden ledge above the street, and surrounded by violently scented hair oil, soap, and

other such things, was the Hindu shopkeeper with a young Afghan standing before him, greatly desiring a white bath towel with red edges. Tall, slim, with clear-cut, handsome features and a pale skin, he picked up the towel and examined it in detail. He then asked the price, which must have been high because he became indignantly excited, but the Hindu shrugged his shoulders and implied that he could take it or leave it.

The Afghan, however, very much wanted that towel, although I wondered what he would do with it; from his appearance it would most certainly not be used for the purpose for which it was intended. At last he regretfully put it down and turned away and I very nearly went across and bought it for him, but the idea occurred to me too late.

Half-way up the main road was a large public water-point standing on a corner, and it was here I witnessed a quaint little scene where a small naked boy about two feet high was being dragged, howling lustily, to the water, by a little woman who must have been his sister. She was only a foot higher than he was, but she knew how to handle rebellious males. The boy had been rolling in a dust heap, and she was determined to clean him, and at once. She dragged him by an arm, and when he sat down in the dust she thumped him, hauling him onwards on his little seat.

"Never! Never!" he yelled. He also called the girl a she-devil, and other unpleasant names. At the water-point she got the back of his neck firmly between her hands and forced the boy under a fierce stream of water. How that infant howled; he coughed and spluttered as well, when the water went into his open mouth, but no one paid any attention. Well and truly clean, he was released, and stood in the road coughing, screaming

curses, and trying to beat his sister with two tiny fists. She merely laughed at him, slapped his shining wet seat, and drove him homewards.

In a few years time that little woman will become a slave-like wife, walking meekly, sometimes heavily loaded behind her lord and master.

(vi)

When looking for something to read in the small mess library I found that fascinating little book *The Woman of Andros*, by Thornton Wilder. This was the first time I had come across it, and when reading it in my Wana hut I experienced all the pleasure generally obtained from talking to an intelligent and amusing man or woman.

Two passages in this book<sup>1</sup> particularly stand out in my memory :

‘ The mistakes we make through generosity are less terrible than the gains we acquire through caution.’

How alarmingly true that is when applied to those among whom we live. So many people have their aim fixed on the main chance, refusing to face the fact that they will have to pay. Few young people to-day seem to have learned, or been taught, that nothing in life is free, not even affection. Only the very poor can be said to be really generous.

The second passage from this book is even more impressive :

‘ The most exhausting of all our adventures is that journey down the long corridors of the mind, to the last halls where belief is enthroned.’

<sup>1</sup> *The Woman of Andros*, by Thornton Wilder.



What a wonderful and true piece of writing that is. What stumblings, dead ends, and slippery passages there are before we reach those halls. Many, of course, fall by the way and return; others never start.

I cannot resist quoting one more passage. It appeals so strongly :

‘Happy are the associations which have grown out of a fault and a forgiveness.’

There are few things more gratifying to me than for a person to come willingly and admit a fault. However grievous it may be I am drawn closer to them. It is, I suppose, banal to say that we are attracted to fellow-men by their weaknesses and not by their strength.

The social life of the station was naturally very restricted, there being only four women present, but each Sunday morning everyone gathered in the mess garden of one, or other, of the two messes. A regimental band played and we sat under the trees, behaving as people do on such occasions. We talked, drank mildly, and, of course, we members of the court martial, having come up from Quetta, brought an air of freshness into the conversation which had become something of a barren waste.

Everyone had a dog of sorts, and at these parties they livened things up considerably. There was always at least one fight; or they hunted each other, and generally made nuisances of themselves. Among the pack were eight Dalmatians, a mother and seven fully grown children, and a fine litter they were. One daughter, however, had no love, or even respect, for her mother. Much larger, she used foul language, and even fought her parent when they came into close contact. The

*fight usually took place in the middle of the finest flower-bed and made all the other dogs wildly excited.*

(VII)

It was with profound relief that we heard the colonel say in the court room, on the fourteenth day, that all was finished and we were no longer needed. At the back of our minds, however, was the unpleasant thought that we might be dragged back again if Army Headquarters did not agree with our method of conducting the case. No court martial is finally dismissed until the proceedings have been confirmed.

In spite of the ordeal I did enjoy my stay in Chaman, and it was almost with regret that three of us members said good-bye to our kind hosts and then returned to Quetta.

My battery, being in the process of reorganization, had sorely needed my presence, and yet I had been forced to waste these fourteen valuable days. Almost the first things I picked out of the pile of correspondence awaiting me in the battery office were three letters. One stated that I was to attend a T.E.W.T. (tactical exercise without troops); another that I was to conduct a court of enquiry, and the last that I was to attend a brigade commander's conference. This meant that, in the following week, I should only have two working days with my battery. Thoroughly exasperated I realized the futility of trying to train a battery under these conditions, and I decided to ask to be sent to another station and brigade. It will be remembered I had already made up my mind that a Mountain Battery had no attractions for me.

Not long after this a general from Army Headquarters came to inspect the brigade, and to him I intimated that

I wished to be posted to a brigade and battery in which there were British troops. This was regarded by everyone concerned with consternation, and I was forcibly told to reconsider my request. The general, when I refused, put on his most distant manner, and said that, on his return to headquarters, he would see what could be done in the matter. He clearly gave me to understand that he viewed me with black disapproval.

The general returned to the Seats of the Mighty, and sought a method whereby he could twist my obstinate tail. He found one, and gave orders that I was to be sent to a field brigade stationed at Hyderabad in Sind. Hyderabad is the hottest and most unpleasant station in all India.

When this news was broken I had just had two serious differences of opinion with my colonel, and it tipped me over an edge upon which I had been hesitating for some time. I sent in my papers and asked to be allowed to retire: I would return to England and live the existence to which I felt most suited. I was getting no younger, and would enjoy life whilst I was still able to do so. Much was to happen, however, before this took place.

## CHAPTER VIII

(1)

THE battery was handed over to my very indignant captain and I prepared to depart to Hyderabad. He had been recently married and my leaving the battery meant a great deal of extra work for him, at a time when he was far more interested in domestic affairs, and a new battery commander would take some months to arrive.

The journey down to Hyderabad was a hot and dusty one, and on arriving at Sibi, which lies close to the foot of the Bolan Pass, at 2 a.m., we found the temperature was close upon a hundred, and the carriage resembled the inside of a limekiln in full blast.

Those who are wise, during the hot weather on the plains, buy a large slab of ice weighing forty pounds which is placed on a special tray and installed on the floor of the compartment. Here high-speed fans play upon it and the heat becomes almost bearable. There are two stories connected with this practice which are not without humour.

A young man, coming out to India for the first time, landed at Karachi on his way to Quetta. It was the hot weather, and having been given this tip concerning the ice, he decided to make use of it, but unfortunately he had a hazy idea of Indian weights. A 'seer' is two pounds and a 'maund' is eighty: he mistook one for the other. He told his bearer, who had been sent down

to meet him, to arrange for forty maunds of ice to be put in his compartment on the train. The bearer showed extreme surprise and protested vigorously, but was imperiously ordered to go and do as he was told.

The young man appeared on the platform of the station just before the train was due to start, and he was met by his bearer who showed him his compartment, but he was only just able to force his way into it. There was ice everywhere; all over the floor; under the seats; in the luggage racks; and the toilet compartment was stacked with the large blocks. There was, in fact, 3200 pounds of ice in that compartment and the atmosphere was that of a refrigerator. It cost fifty rupees and, as there was not time in which to remove it, the man arrived in Quetta in a half-frozen condition.

A certain young woman, on arriving in Quetta during the hot weather, was removed from her carriage in an unconscious condition and rushed off to hospital, where the doctors tried to discover what was the matter with her. When she came to her senses it was learned that, all the way from the Indus to Quetta, she had sat on her block of ice, with two high-powered fans playing on her head. Why she was not dead when found is still something of a mystery.

The first glimpses of Hyderabad, gained from the carriage windows, are those of scattered buildings which rapidly close in and become a dense mass of tall houses and uneven roofs. On these roofs are a forest of very strange erections of unique design, which are thousands and thousands of diamond-shaped, wooden wind-scoops, all of which face in the same direction. The prevailing wind, during the summer, comes from the sea and Karachi, some hundred miles away, and the scoops are kept closed during the heat of the day, but opened

when the cooler breezes start to blow after sundown, and they bring relief to the overheated upper rooms in the city.

Just beyond the station are the high and extensive walls of the ancient fort, with curiously crinkled brick-work, which clearly shows the passage of time and lack of attention.

It was eleven-thirty in the morning when the train drew into Hyderabad, and stopped at a platform on which there appeared to be a riot in full progress. A large crowd surged to and fro in extreme agitation, in which Indians of all classes, races, creeds, and social standing, struggled either to get into the train, or to fight their way out of it. Mothers, aunts, cousins, coolies, *babus*, *bunnias*, food vendors, water-carriers, small children, animals of various kinds and station officials, all were there. Every passenger, or would-be passenger, carried at least three bundles, and they charged each other, with progeny clinging and screaming at their skirts, or the tails of their shirts.

I flung open the carriage door, and a hot blast of air came into the compartment and nearly caused me to stagger. Stepping down into the crowd I stood aghast. Never had I experienced such heat, and I felt that, in a few minutes, I should melt entirely away. The crowd, smelling of perspiration, stale ghee (rancid butter), rank tobacco, and unclean child, dashed against me like angry waters. Out of it came a small, very young, and damp subaltern, who had been sent down from cantonments to greet me, and from him I learned that the temperature was over 119 degrees. I could well believe it: it might have been 219 on that platform.

The subaltern and I stood and whipped the perspiration from our faces as we waited for my young bearer

to appear and deal with the luggage. He came at last, and I watched him fight his way into the carriage and attempt to deal with the mob of semi-naked coolies who swarmed around the door, thereby preventing another passenger from getting into the train. This person, a large, red-faced man, swept aside the coolies only to be met in the doorway by my roll of bedding. The bearer, considerably agitated, failed to see the sahib and gave the bedding a hard push, with the result that it took him in the middle and cast him backwards into the arms of the coolies. The subaltern laughed and I, having no desire to hear the language, nor to be associated with the incident, hurried away. Later I enquired of the bearer what had happened. The bearer grinned.

“The sahib called me many strange names, none of which I understood. He then beat a coolie over the head with his coat and they raged together. The sahib was a terrible man and much angered.”

During the drive in a tiny motor car through the city to the cantonments, I sat back and realized that I was going to pay dearly for my obstinate attitude in Quetta.

(11)

I connect Hyderabad with many things, mostly unpleasant, where there were heat, glare, dust-storms, boredom, depression, and the feeling of having been set down in a lost and God-forsaken place in which no one would live unless they were forced to do so.

The cantonments are tiny, and consist of one main and one minor road, and on either side of these roads are the bungalows, standing, for the most part, in bare, dusty, yellow compounds. There is a small club and a large, red-brick church with a spire, and the station is composed of one brigade of artillery and an Indian regiment.

Our mess, to which I was taken, cheered me somewhat, because it stood in what was almost a garden, where there were a few trees, a little grass, and flowers planted in pots. The interior was dim, spacious, and reasonably cool, after the frightful heat outside.

The damp young subaltern gave me a long cool drink, and then informed me that the colonel wished to see me as soon as I arrived. Wondering why he should be in such a hurry to make my acquaintance we got into the car once again, and set out for the brigade office. The route led across the station parade-ground, a large expanse of flat, yellow, stony, and dusty ground, on the far side of which were the single-storied barracks, lining a bleached horizon.

In his office was the colonel, a fat man, very fat; he was also damp, and sitting under a large fan. He greeted me and asked why I had come to join his brigade. On being told the reason he stated that there was nothing for me to do, as he did not propose to give me a battery in view of the fact that I should be remaining for so short a time.

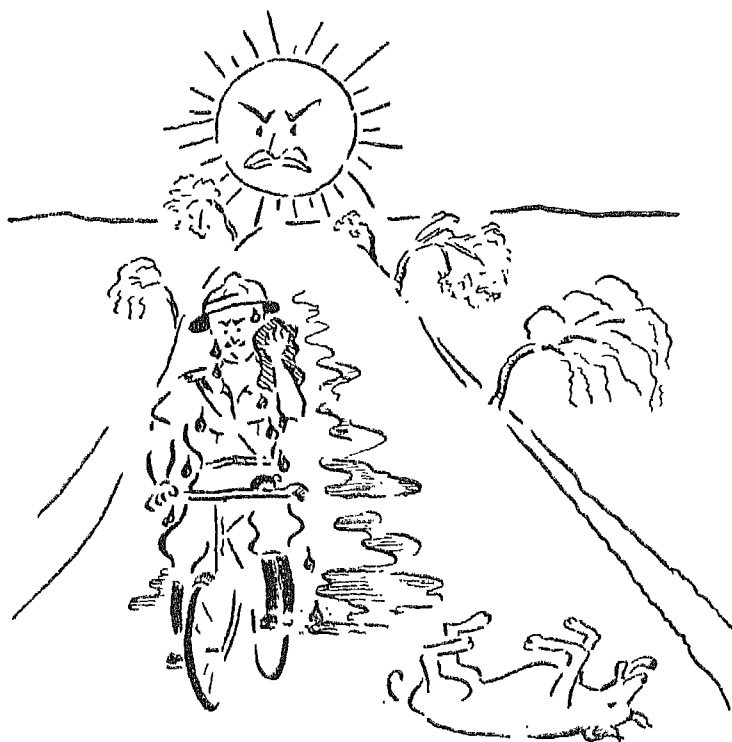
Dismissed, I sought my bungalow, and found it was on the same road as the mess, but a considerable distance from it. It closely resembled the one in Peshawar, where the great central room was adorned with a few pieces of vile furniture which accentuated its bareness. The veranda looked out and down, for the cantonments stood on a low ridge, to a wide vista of green trees in the middle distance, and towards the River Indus, three miles away.

The central room was reasonably cool, and I found that, by keeping all the doors and windows tightly closed, it was possible, during the heat of the day, to keep the temperature down to about 97 degrees, when it was in



the region of 118 in the veranda. What the temperature in the sun was I have no idea, but should imagine about 200.

I returned to the mess for luncheon, and used my bicycle to do so. The long ride down the Mall was



H.F.

appalling where the heat poured down from above, and was reflected from off the surface of the road and made me gasp, and it was unwise to touch any of the metal portions of my machine.

One by one damp officers drifted into the mess and I was introduced, and it took me a very short time to sense the atmosphere of this, my new home. It lacked

the cheerfulness and friendliness of the mess I had left, but this I realized was partly due to the climatic conditions.

Returning to my bungalow I found that my baggage had arrived, and, clad in a towel, the bearer and I started to unpack. The bearer was frankly horrified at the conditions, and would constantly break off the operations to show me this or that inconvenience. The water upset him more than anything else. The only supply came from the Indus and this, before being sent out into the pipes, was partly filtered. The water, however, from our taps was still extremely dirty, and I learned that the procedure was to allow it to fill the zinc bath tub, where the mud settled, and by passing a lump of alum through the liquid it caused the remaining sediment to collect on the sides and fall to the bottom in an astonishing manner. The water was then transferred to another tub, and was ready for use. All drinking water was, of course, filtered and boiled.

It was not long before I gave up helping the bearer to unpack, and going to the bed I lay down, feeling hot and depressed, where, watching the large ceiling fan slowly revolve, I thought of England. It was June and the glorious southern country-side was green and lovely, the gardens a mass of flowers, and above all it was cool. It was probably raining at that moment, but how I could have welcomed some of that fine drizzle brought by the damp, south-west winds.

Turning over on to my side I wondered why I, a poor man, should have been cursed with that wanderlust which led me into places such as I was then enduring. At the time of which I am writing it seemed as if I should have to remain in Hyderabad for several months and this thought was so disturbing that it took me off the bed to

pace up and down the room with agitated steps. What a fool I had been. Those months might have been spent in Quetta. Then came the soothing thought that misfortunes are rarely as bad as they seem.

At 6.30, after a bath and change, I went down to the club and found it a pleasant spot, where the club house faced a small garden in which there were many tall, shady trees, green grass, and flowers. In the club itself were a dance floor, reading-rooms, a bar, and a small, but good library, whilst just outside was an excellent covered swimming-pool.

In the course of the evening most of the station appeared, and I was introduced to a number of strangers, all of whom appeared pleasant and cheerful, in spite of the hot wind which was still blowing. By 8 o'clock the temperature had dropped considerably, and if you kept quite still you actually, without the use of a fan, ceased to perspire.

All the outdoor parades in this station during the hot weather were held in the early hours of the morning. After breakfast, that is from 8.30 onwards, no one ventured outside unless forced to do so and in order to proceed from one spot to another. After luncheon, every European went to his bungalow, or barrack-room, and remained there until 6.30 in the evening, when the heat began to moderate, and it was then that people gradually emerged to play tennis, ride, or swim in the club pool.

During my stay in this station I found those long hours of imprisonment in the bungalow a durance vile. Many people slept the whole time, but I am one of those who can only close my eyes for an hour and it was far too hot to concentrate seriously upon anything, with the result that I spent many hours pacing up and down the

room, restless and disinclined to work, or read. During those hours the hot wind blew, moaning fretfully in the verandah, the ceiling-fan revolved with a maddening persistency, and there was no one to talk to.

Here is the story of the egg, and it is true. At luncheon one morning in the mess somebody was complaining of the heat and his voice raised in lamentation he declared he was sure it would be possible to fry an egg in the heat of the full sun outside. At once several of us present agreed to try the experiment.

A small iron frying-pan was placed for an hour on the muzzle of an ancient gun in the mess compound. Nine of us then picked up our topees and, complete with the egg, went out to the appointed spot where I was of the opinion that the heat would not only fry that egg, but boil it as well.

The egg was duly broken into the pan in which a small amount of fat had been placed. At once the white began to cloud and in an hour and ten minutes the egg was well and truly cooked; it was, in fact, overdone. It was not eaten but kept as an exhibit.

Hyderabad, in spite of the heat, is not an unhealthy station, and there is little sickness, other than that of the mind, and this is accounted for by the comparative coolness of the nights, the absence of biting insects, and the dryness of the atmosphere. Normally only two batteries of artillery are stationed here, but since the earthquake in Quetta two more have had to be accommodated.

Hyderabad city, although large, is not old, having been built by Mian Gulam Shah in 1768, when the Indus changed its course to the present one. Before that time the river flowed through the desert seventy miles to the east, where the old bed can still be seen.

The city was the residence of the rulers of Sind, and it was occupied by General Sir Charles Napier after the battle of Miani. There is little of interest in it, and the large fort is now an empty shell, most of the buildings having been destroyed in 1906 by a fearful explosion in a black powder magazine. The inhabitants are Hindus, and there is none of the fascination of Peshawar to be found here, although the streets, especially in the evenings, were densely packed with a variegated mass of slowly moving people. Plump and prosperous merchants and weird holy men rubbed shoulders, and between these extremes were those usually found in such cities.

The strangest sight I saw was a negro whose vast bulk was actually pear-shaped. He did not appear to have any shoulders, and the body, from the neck downwards, sloped outwards to become a vast paunch from which protruded two ridiculous and fat little legs. His head was also the shape of a pear, and its crown might also have been said to end in a point. He was so remarkable that I followed him for a short distance, cursing myself that I had no camera. The man was very angry with something, or someone, and a crowd of boys jeered at him as he waddled down the roadway.

Close to the gate of the fort I came upon a holy man who was unusual in several ways. He was clean, really so, and that was no mean wonder. His semi-naked body was hung about with beads, amulets, pieces of dark hair, and charms, and he carried in his right hand a strange, thick, knobbly, and highly polished club, whilst in his left was a small drumstick. His hair fell to his shoulders in ringlets, and just above the ridges of his straight nose was a large dab of scarlet pigment.

A young man, his face was attractive, and he laughed and smiled in a pleasant manner.

He was popular with the children, who crowded about him in such numbers that a policeman was forced to order him to move on because he was holding up the traffic. Beating a small drum at his waist, he laughed and danced a jig, to the great joy of the young spectators, but I never discovered who, or what, he was.

(III)

Late one afternoon I mounted my bicycle, and set off to visit the dead cantonments which lay on the banks of the Indus four miles away. These cantonments were given up many years ago, as they were considered unhealthy and were being continually flooded by the rising of the river. A long, straight, shady road, well planted with trees, led towards the Indus, and ended in a large village on its banks. The river, a vast expanse of wind-troubled water, was the colour of damp earth, and it flowed strongly as if approaching rapids.

Turning left in the village I proceeded down what was very much a country road, which was below the level of the flood-protecting banks. Bumping to and fro, at the end of a mile I came upon a large empty bungalow, standing in what had once been a well-kept garden. I went into the bungalow, which considering its age was in a remarkably good state of preservation, although the white ants were causing havoc with the doorposts and other woodwork. The place is said to be haunted and my footsteps rang as I walked through room after room, each in semi-darkness. There was an eerie and most disturbing atmosphere abroad, and when a nearby swinging door banged I jumped con-

vulsively, and thought it was far nicer outside in the sunlight.

Further down the road were the remains of old gardens from which the buildings had long vanished, and all that is left of the Residency is an obelisk standing in the middle of a ploughed field. This monument records the fact that a certain company during the wars in Sind put up a very gallant stand from the Residency in the face of overwhelming numbers.

After becoming lost in a tangle of dykes and canal banks I came at last upon Sir Charles Napier's house, and the old guest-house, standing on the banks of the river amid palm trees. Both these fine buildings are rapidly disintegrating, where the staircases have gone, as has much of the woodwork, and the lovely blue tiles on the roof-tops are broken and discoloured. Whilst wandering through the rooms, and keeping a sharp look-out for snakes, I thought of all the past achievements of the nearly forgotten man who won this great slice of India for us. If you were to ask the average educated man at home who Napier was, he would reply :

"Napier. Yes. Let me see. Did something in India, didn't he ? Fought battles and things."

The living rooms of the guest-house still showed a few remains of once elaborate decoration, but the splendour has all departed, as it has with the house, which stands some distance away facing the river. The garden is now rapidly vanishing under a thick layer of white sand, and soon there will be nothing left to mark this historic spot where Napier must have made so many momentous decisions.

The only other sights of note near Hyderabad are the tombs of the kings of Sind, which stand on a ridge above cantonments, but these are dilapidated in the

extreme, and the bright blue tiles with which they were adorned are now much broken and scattered.

In spite of the heat the surrounding country is well cultivated, and there appears to be an ample supply of water, presumably from the river.

(IV)

Much to my surprise I ran into Gunner Yelland one morning, and learned that, after all, he had not gone to Amballa.

"Well, and how do you like Hyderabad?" I asked him.

Gunner Yelland, his face paler and thinner than when I last saw it, made a non-committal reply.

"Come along and have a talk with me this evening," I suggested. "About six o'clock. My bungalow is Number Thirty-three."

He accepted this invitation with pleased surprise and punctually at six o'clock he presented himself. I had told him not to come in uniform, but to make himself as comfortable as he could, with the result that he was now wearing khaki drill trousers and an open-neck shirt of violent colouring.

He sat down on the edge of the chair I offered and was charmingly embarrassed. He refused a chota peg, but later accepted one under pressure. I was glad of this, for a whisky and soda can loosen the tongue, and I was deeply interested to hear what he thought of the life in the station.

Until the glass was nearly empty we talked of the voyage out, and other things, and, gradually, my guest moved back into the chair and a more comfortable position. I then opened the topic.



"I think this is a frightful station, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I do that. But you see, sir, I haven't been to any other. It wasn't so bad when we first came here, but now, Gawd! It does get yer down, sir."

"What don't you like about it?" I enquired. "The heat?"

"Yes, sir. That's one thing, but there's many others, too. The dust, for instance. You see the barracks is the wrong side of the parade-ground, an' when the wind blows, as it does now, sir, every bit of dust blows into our barrack rooms."

"Yes, that is pretty beastly," I agreed. "Is it like that all the year?"

"Pretty nearly, sir."

"What do you do after dinners?"

"Oh, we goes and lies on our beds in the barrack rooms, sir. There ain't nothing else to do. It's too hot to go outside."

"Do you read?"

"Sometimes, sir, but I've read all there is to read, and I can't afford to buy books in the bazaar."

"Then what do you do if you don't read? Talk?"

"Mainly we just lies, because there ain't nothing to talk about. I've spent many a afternoon just lying and looking up at the ceiling and watching the fan go round. It sort of sends you funny after a while, but you gets used to it."

I poured out another *cbota peg* and offered the cigarettes. The whisky and soda was beginning to work and I pressed for further information. All this, of course, was strictly against custom, majors not being supposed to entertain Gunners in their rooms.

"Then there's the work, sir. Of course I shouldn't grumble, sir, but out here you gets sick of doing the same

old thing every day. But it's the guards we hate the most." Gunner Yelland hesitated, looked at me, and realized that he was talking too freely.

"Go on," I encouraged him. "You can tell me. I won't give you away. I may even be able to help. What is wrong with the guards?"

"You ask me what's wrong with 'em, sir." His voice rose in sympathy with his feelings. "How would you like to stand on a veranda, sir, for two hours on end on a afternoon like this, and dressed up in thick puttees and boots and a tight tunic round your neck, and a bloody heavy rifle on yer shoulder?"

I showed due appreciation of this unpleasant duty.

"You see, sir, the veranda of the guard-room don't even face the breeze, and when we sweats through our tunics the R.S.M. (Regimental Sergeant-Major) comes up and chokes us off, he does. Do you know, sir, I've been through three tunics in two hours. And I've known fellows go sick for days after a guard here. They'd do anything to get out of doing it, sir."

(I was able to change this state of affairs, and there were no more afternoon guards.)

And so for two *chota pegs* I learned this and many other things which cannot be put on to paper for various reasons.

From what has been indicated it will be realized that a soldier's life in India to-day, speaking generally, is a bad business. He spends much of his time in an acute state of boredom, he suffers badly from a lack of feminine society, and he has to pay absurd prices for his beer, amusements, and even for his postage on letters home.

It is true that improvements have been made, but they are few and far between. The Government of India

refuses to spend money on the army and a continual struggle is taking place at Army Headquarters to obtain money for bare necessities. The attitude of the Government can be summed up in the following.

Quite recently the civil authorities were unable to obtain Indian labour gangs for road-making in Waziristan and therefore ordered the soldiers to do the work instead. Both British and Indian soldiers were employed on what was a coolie's work. They worked in four-hour stretches, and the British soldier was paid one anna (one penny) per hour and the Indian a quarter of an anna, and this was only paid to men who were actually using a pick-axe, or a shovel. Such meanness takes away one's breath. One Indian regiment, when asked what happened to the money received for their men, replied that the amounts were so small that they were used to buy extra blanco for cleaning the men's equipment, an article which should have been supplied by the Government.

Single officers, engaged in fighting on the frontier, were definitely worse off from a monetary point of view than they were in cantonments. Lodging allowances were stopped, and they were in no way compensated for living under conditions of acute discomfort. One group of officers was actually made to pay rent for their empty mess in cantonments.

The Field Brigade at Hyderabad, consisting of over six hundred British gunners, was condemned to endure this station, not really fitted for Indian troops, because it would cost money to provide them with other accommodation in another station.

The British soldier is no longer a dumb, illiterate person, and he can, and does, write home letters which would horrify the War Office, could it read them. What has always been a source of wonderment to me is

how well-behaved he is under conditions resembling those of sixty years ago.

During my time in India I was, on many occasions, given the opportunity to talk with men in widely dispersed regiments and I gathered many interesting points of view, not the least of them being that on the recruiting problem, which was at that time exercising the minds of the War Office. From what was said to me, in all sincerity, I gathered that those at home who guide the destiny of the army are either out of touch with the real views of the private soldier, or else they refuse to face the unpleasant truth.

Most people realize that the greater the country's prosperity the more acute becomes the question of obtaining men for the Services. Why should this be so? The truth is, that the army is regarded in civilian circles as the last resort of the incompetent. In other words, a man joins the army because no one wants him in civil life. This may not in actual fact be the whole truth, but what matters is, the civilian believes it to be the absolute truth. We have gone back with a vengeance to the time when Kipling wrote his famous 'Tommy'.

There are many who will deny that this is the case, but the fact remains, every man to whom I have spoken, and they are many, have thought along these lines. One man said to me recently :

" Why, sir, when yer are at home on leave and they asks yer what yer does and when you says yer in the army, they draws away, they do. And that's the bloody truth, it is. And in India yer are treated as just so much muck, not fit to be with decent people."

Another, and more educated, man :

" Well, sir, the truth is that most of us feel a definite

loss of caste when we join the army. I can assure you that nearly every man has a try for the navy, or the Marines, before he joins up."

From the conversations I dug more deeply and received some enlightening replies which can be summed up in three lines from Kipling's 'Tommy.'

"Don't mess about the cook-room slops,  
But prove it to our faces  
The Widow's Uniform is not a soldier-man's disgrace."

The devices now in force to attract men to join the army are excellent in every way, because they benefit the soldier himself, but they fail to eradicate the root of the trouble, which, as has been said, does not lie in the army, but outside it. Before any lasting improvement can be effected the status of the soldier must be raised among civilians. How can this be brought about? I suggest the following:

Every soldier should be granted small privileges denied to civilians. Free transit on all forms of public conveyances when in uniform, and that the concession should be extended to the girl, or woman, in company with the soldier.

Free entrance allowed, when in uniform, to all public institutions for which an entrance fee is usually charged. This would include such things as museums, historical sites, seaside-piers, etc. Here again the woman companion should enjoy the privilege.

Reduced entrance charges to certain forms of entertainment such as cinemas, when the soldier is in uniform.

Such innovations would instantly cause the civilian population, from whom the soldier comes, to realize that he is a privileged person and not an object of derision.

I gathered also from my talks that the soldier loathes the stand-up collar and would welcome a collar and tie.

One morning when, as usual, in the brigade office trying to find something to do, the colonel sent for me and stated that there was a job vacant on the staff of Western Command Headquarters in Karachi. It was to fill the post of an officer who was going home on long leave. Would I care to accept it? I did, instantly. What the job consisted of mattered not at all : it was a chance to escape from Hyderabad.

Once again I packed up my belongings and departed ; a thing I seemed to have been doing ever since I landed in India. Those stationed in Hyderabad had been extremely kind and hospitable towards me ; far more so than I deserved, but then, how often the least worthy of us gain rewards denied to those far more deserving.

## CHAPTER IX

### I

**T**HIS chapter is in the nature of a collection of sketches giving my impressions of people, things, and happenings in Karachi.

Karachi is one of the larger Indian ports and its harbour is like a river, being a long, narrow stretch of water. On the land side the city ends abruptly in desert ; a yellow, stony, barren waste. There are huge and scattered cantonments, and extensive business sections, and a large Indian city. The port handles the heavy wheat and cotton traffic from the north and so is comparatively wealthy.

In cantonments there are two British regiments and one Indian, a battery of artillery for the defence of the harbour, and all the various administrative services. There is a large civil population, which is headed by the Governor of Sind, and a host of more junior officials.

The houses are houses and not bungalows, and many of them are quite pleasant. The shops, in cantonments, are, for India, excellent, and the streets wide and well kept. Scattered over the whole area of the port are many charming public gardens, in fact I have never seen so many in one place.

Considering that Karachi is only just not in the tropics it has a surprisingly pleasant climate, although the months of June and July can be hot and tiresome, but, from August onwards until the cold weather at the end

of October, the temperature resembles that of a warm summer's day at home. The reason for this is the strong sea breeze which blows day and night, keeping everything cool and fresh, but you have only to go into a room with closed windows and no fan to discover how unpleasant Karachi would be if there were no breeze.

Another blessing possessed by the place is the comparative absence of biting insects. Nets are rarely used, and there is little or no malaria, or sand-fly fever. One of the curses, however, is the number of loud-voiced birds that there are. What they have to talk about, and always at the top of their voices, is a mystery. The crows, of which there are thousands, are by far the worst offenders, and I have known one to sit on a branch of a tree near my room and caw for ten minutes without pausing.

Speaking of birds it is amusing to watch two mynahs who have discovered a lurking cat. From a safe distance they scream what is obviously the vilest abuse, whilst the cat sits and looks up at them with smouldering eyes which are far more expressive than a voice.

Two pigeons built a nest on a roof close to my bathroom window and the husband was a fine, up-standing bird, but of no great beauty. His wife was smaller, coy, and a most shameless flirt who caused her husband many a jealous qualm. Whilst he dutifully sat on the eggs she dallied nearby with an elegant young roué who owned a fine white tail.

The lover, with much pretence at feather-cleaning, would draw close to his love and she, I regret to say, listened to his blandishments. Suddenly the husband on the nest would become aware of what was going on. Hurriedly leaving his post he would descend upon the guilty pair and severely peck and beat with his wings



until he drove off the would-be ravisher of his home. This happened several times and I could almost fancy I heard that lady pigeon sigh regretfully.

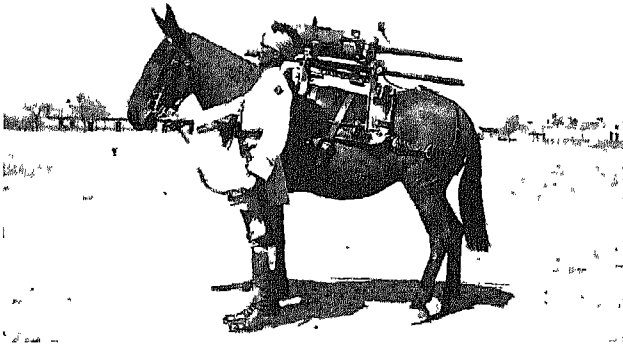
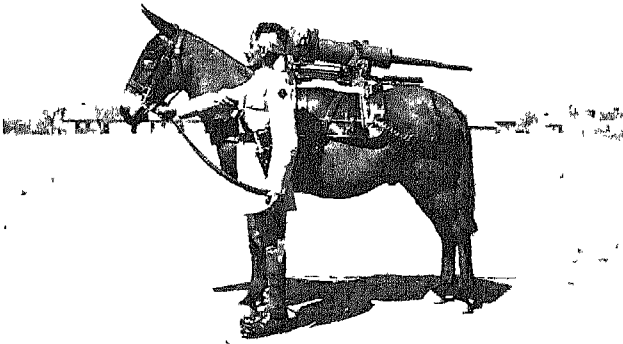
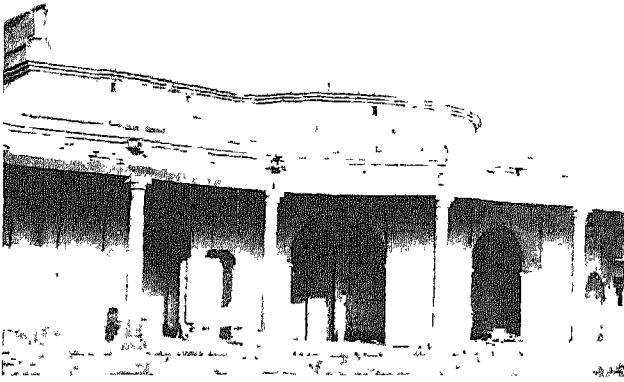
Installed in my inexpensive and comfortable hotel in the middle of cantonments I stretched myself and felt that I had awakened from a bad dream. My rooms, compared to those in Hyderabad, were civilized, with their clear running water and pleasant furniture : gone, and I hoped for ever, was that God-forsaken atmosphere. Once again I was in a place where people lived rather than existed, or so I supposed ; later I found that this was untrue.

For the first two months no one took the slightest interest in me, in spite of the fact that I had done all my official calling, and so, being an onlooker, I was able to observe those I met in the various clubs ; the opinion formed was not flattering.

Many of the younger men appeared to spend all their leisure hours in hunting other men's wives, daughters, or relations. This was done quite openly and I am sure that, in many cases, there was nothing particularly wrong in this curious form of amusement, but the result was that the women invaded the bars of certain clubs and even sat on the counters as they dallied with their boy friends.

During my stay in Karachi a very nasty affair took place which caused many people to sit back and think seriously. I give the story because the events which led up to it were reasonably typical of the conditions prevailing. The full details were never made public, but what I imagine took place was this :

Mr. and Mrs. X were a young and newly-married couple, having been wed in England a few months before their arrival in Karachi. They lived in what was



(Top) Napier's house on the banks of the Indus at Hyderabad, Sind.  
(Middle and bottom) Typical Mountain Battery Mules. These are carrying two pieces of the gun.



a glorified form of boarding house where they had one large bedroom. Mr. X was sent up country to an unpleasant station on the frontier and, of course, he was forced to leave his wife behind. Now Mrs. X was fond of dancing and gaiety, in a perfectly natural way, and was not going to sit at home for three months awaiting her husband's return. (Had there been a child the affair would probably never have taken place). As a result she became friendly with a young man who was said to be a quiet, pleasant, inoffensive fellow, whom we will call B. B occupied a room next to that of Mrs. X and they went about a good deal together, but not more so than many others.

Mr. X in his frontier station was, of course, informed by friends of what his wife was doing, and he brooded over it as some men will do in such circumstances. On his return to Karachi he and his wife went to a dance at the Boat Club where they had a difference of opinion and left just before midnight. In the car going home the difference of opinion developed into a full blown row, and I suspect that it concerned B.

In their room the row was continued and Mrs. X became very excited and foolishly called out B's name. He, in his room, heard her, came out, opened the X's door and was about to enter when X shot him between the eyes. X then fired twice at his wife, but missed her, and she fled. X then shot himself in the head and made a mess of it, taking six hours to die.

No one in the station had the faintest notion that X felt so strongly regarding his wife's conduct, and, as a result, many another woman, together with her boy friend, looked at her husband in a new light, which was a good, or a bad thing, just according to how you regard it.

When complaining to an acquaintance, shortly after my arrival in Karachi, that one or two men to whom I had been introduced were, afterwards, hardly civil, I received the following astounding explanation.

“Of course, my dear fellow. You’re a new-comer and a bachelor. They fear for their wives.”

And he meant what he said.

The business man of any standing in this city is very like his fellow. He is plump and often fat, inclined to baldness, has pouches under his chin, and is ruled by his wife. He has no interest outside his work, except a game of golf and trying to exist as comfortably as possible. He has invariably been in the country too long, and when he does go home to retire he will die quietly and quickly. He is amiable, easy-going, and reasonably hospitable.

I met a number of women, curiously enough some of them Service wives, who were charming, intelligent, and above all who knew how to dress themselves. Not one woman in ten in India knows how to dress, and yet they spend a considerable amount of time and trouble upon themselves.

Many women robe themselves in what appears to be the material from which flowered curtains and chair covers are made. This may be all very well in a young girl, but on a woman of thirty, or over, it looks suburban. I am told, on good authority, that the reason why many women in India dress so badly is that they cannot afford to do otherwise. That seems to be nonsense. Surely it is better to have three good dresses than ten poor ones? The matter is further complicated by the fact that women dress to attract the attention of other women, and not to please a man’s eye. Whatever the reason, the results are deplorable and a dance at the Gymkhana,

or the Boat Club, closely resembles a tennis 'hop' at Ealing, or Golder's Green.

From the social point of view India does not seem to have changed since the days when Kipling wrote his *Plain Tales from the Hills*. In Karachi I found the counterparts of Pluffles, Saggott, the Boy, a mild form of Mrs. Hauksbee, and Mrs. Reiver; the Bremmils, Bronchorts, Dicky Hatt, and Wonder were all there, and also a few others not mentioned by Kipling, for fear, I suppose, of libel.

Social activities of all kinds start at ungodly hours, with drinking parties at 7.45 p.m.; dinner-parties at 8.45 or 9 p.m.: and, when asked to dinner, it is rare for the guests to be able to get to bed before one in the morning. There is an air of restlessness overhanging everything which is most noticeable and at dinner the meal is invariably hurried because the hosts wish to drag you off to a cinema entertainment, which starts at ten o'clock and ends at 12.15 a.m. or even later.

The art of after-dinner entertainment has been lost, or perhaps never discovered, and you must dance, or go to an entertainment, or play silly games. Hosts do not realize that many of their guests, after a good dinner, prefer to sit quietly and perhaps listen to one or two first-class records on a low-toned gramophone, or by skilful grouping on the part of the hostess be allowed to sit and talk, or listen.

People in India, and Karachi in particular, can be quite shameless where anything free is concerned. I attended a large cocktail party which was admirably run, and arriving at 7.45 I remained until 8.45 when I felt it was time to depart, much as I should have liked to remain. My host, the following day, told me that it was 12.30 a.m. before he finally got rid of all his guests,

some of whom he had had to ask to stay to dinner. Even at official cocktail parties this same practice is a rule with some people, rather than the exception.

There are seven clubs in Karachi, instead of the usual one or two. If you dance, or play tennis, then you belong to the Gymkhana; swim, row, or dance, then the Boat Club; sail from the Yacht Club, golf at the Golf Club, and a library and the more dignified entertainments are to be found at the Sind Club. What you do at the Karachi and Country Clubs I do not know; perhaps just drink! If you are keen on all these things then it is possible to pay over ten pounds a month in subscriptions alone.

The two most popular clubs are the Gymkhana and the Boat Club. The Gymkhana is a large building of the bungalow type with a deep veranda on one side which looks on to a wide lawn of deep green grass, surrounded by shady trees and many flowers. In the building are a dance floor, a bar, a cocktail bar, and a cheerful and comfortable lounge. There are many tennis courts of the hard variety on which, from 5.30 p.m. onwards, collect a mixed assortment of players.

At 4.30 on Monday afternoons a pipe band from an Indian regiment appears on the lawn and marches up and down playing tunes which are better heard from a distant mountain-side. This is the children's afternoon and over a hundred are present, together with their nurses, ayahs, and bearers. To those interested in children and human nature it is a fascinating hour, because it is possible to sit on the veranda and see children at their play who are unaware that they are being watched by elders. All types are there, and their ages range from two to seven years. There are the gay and solemn; spiteful and kindly; well-mannered and self-willed;

and many are the little scenes which develop, only to end in wrath, turbulence, and tears.

We will sit and watch for a few moments. Not far away are two small boys about five years old who are playing a game which is centred about a cane chair. Another little boy of unprepossessing appearance attempts to join in, but very politely he is requested to go away. He refuses and annoys the two players by getting in their way. He wanders off at last and one of the two boys now turns to the other and says something to him. They both turn and look towards where another boy is standing, and from what happens he is obviously a common enemy. He is fat, bad-tempered, and sulky. Side by side the two approach and suddenly, and violently, they push the nasty boy on to his back on the grass. Having worked off their exasperation they return to their game, whilst the assaulted one roars with surprise and rage, and is promptly slapped by his ayah who is unaware of what has happened.

Just below where we are sitting is a pretty little girl who is slowly and sedately posturing before five other girls who look on with wide, unblinking eyes. They stand very still and say nothing.

The pipers march up and down and infants wander between their legs and about their feet. Why some are not trodden on is a mystery, but the pipers neither change their step, nor lose their dressing.

Under a large tree is a six-foot Pathan bearer who is rocking a fair-haired piece of feminine charm as she sits in a cane chair. She is imperiously demanding that the pace shall be increased and the man looks down and a smile shows a flash of white teeth.

No one listens to the music, but all manner of exciting games are being played in which small boys fight, show



off, and strut up and down, openly displaying all the vanity with which the male is filled. The girls mostly keep together and are far better behaved, but here you can see the men and women of to-morrow, and it is possible to determine, accurately, the types they will be in later years.

The Boat Club is situated some distance from cantonments, on the edge of one of the deep creeks which branch off from the head of the harbour. The building consists of a large, wide veranda, on which is a dance floor, a small bar, and dressing-rooms, whilst below, at the water's edge, are the usual facilities for bathing and rowing. During the hot months of May, June, and July, this club is undoubtedly the coolest and most pleasant spot in Karachi, and the place is generally crowded each evening and on Thursday and Sunday mornings, when people come to bathe, or sit in the cool sea breeze and watch others in the water.

During the monsoon, bathing is not possible in the sea owing to the roughness and the presence in large numbers of a small stinging creature known as a Portuguese Man-o'-War.

The water at the Boat Club is not clean, it having to find its way down the whole length of the harbour, and four hundred yards from the club, past which the current flows, is a spot where many Hindus bath themselves, and camels, horses, and donkeys are washed. Personally I prefer sea water, but many people do bathe here, and suffer no apparent ill-effects.

Dancing is popular with the younger set at this club and we will attend on a Tuesday evening, where from 11 p.m. onwards the dance floor becomes crowded. A few couples stand out from a dull mass of people who shuffle across the floor to the tune of a dirge.

Dancing with a slim, dark-haired young man with a square face, is a woman who has a naturally gay temperament. She is generally smiling, or laughing, and sees much fun in life. Sensible, and a charming mother, she has a mop of bronze hair which she finds some difficulty in keeping in order. Beyond her is an A.D.C. who, although we do not know him, exudes Eton, the Bath Club, and the best people. He is dancing with a pale young woman in a black dress who gazes languidly at those they pass.

Here comes an unusual little woman who looks twenty-seven and yet we know that she has a son of twenty-three. She wears her hair in an unusual style which is vaguely Victorian and she smiles as she passes on the arm of her pleasant husband.

There goes a woman of uncertain age whose 'make up' is over done. She has a passion for young, fair, and slightly callow subalterns, in fact she is dancing with one of them. She has a husband somewhere, but we never see him, and do not know what he looks like. Her eyes are a little hard, and in them there also seems to be a hunted look.

At the bar, which is round one corner of the veranda, is a crowd of men and several women. They talk, but rarely smile, and a laugh causes you to turn your head. Two couples are wasting their money on those damnable inventions known as fruit machines and it is all rather dull, and makes you wonder why people take the trouble to do this sort of thing. The tunes from the gramophone are uninspiring, there is no spontaneous gaiety, and many of those present are frankly bored and wondering when they will be able to break away and go to bed. In spite of this, these same people can be seen doing exactly similar things three and four times in a week.

If you suggested that an amusing book, or intelligent conversation in the comfort of your own house was preferable they would look at you in amazement.

On my way home from such few parties that I did attend I have tried to recall definite conversations, and found it not at all easy. Here however is a typical exchange of remarks between myself and a dance partner.

We start to dance.

Myself: "And what have you been doing with yourself?"

Girl: "Oh, nothing in particular."

Myself: "It is quite pleasant and cool to-night, isn't it?"

Girl: "Yes, isn't it."

A pause.

Myself: "Did you see the Mae West film?"

Girl: "No. Was it good?"

Myself: "Yes. Most amusing. I have not laughed so much for a long time."

The dance ends and I encore. The music starts again and we continue to walk up and down the floor.

Myself: "Quite a crowd here to-night."

Girl: "Yes, isn't there? I don't often see you here."

Myself: "No I'm afraid too much of this sort of thing bores me. Do you come here regularly?"

Girl: "Yes, quite often."

Myself: "Who is that woman over there? She looks interesting."

Girl: "Do you mean the woman in white?"

Myself: "Yes."

Girl: "That's Mrs. Brown. She's just come out from home. Do you think she is pretty?"

Myself: "Well hardly pretty, but definitely unusual, and knows how to dress herself."

And so the conversation drags on until I find a fresh partner and start all over again.

## (II)

I found two good things in Karachi ; one a bookshop, the other, fruit.

The bookshop I found by accident, and it was owned by two plump and amiable Indians, where for a small sum each month you could borrow any book in the shop, and it was here, to my joyful surprise, I came across many good, and one or two excellent books. Two in particular stand out in my memory, for they were clear springs in the arid mental waste of those among whom I lived. To browse over them was as stimulating as conversing with a cultured person. Who, for example, could fail to respond to such diverting thoughts as these taken from *A Book without a Name*, written by an eighteenth-century woman to her natural son ?<sup>1</sup>

‘ If we mothers could but rule the realm we might most properly insure the peaceableness of the nations by betokening the ridiculous quality of these wars that men engage in. Why should men, who are but impudent and browling boys, compass such evils for our times ? To bethump the quarrellous schoolboy beats wisdom into his skin ; even so might men be taught.’

(The thought of bethumping a Hitler or a Mussolini is a diverting one.)

‘ Every particle of happiness that the gods give me I intend to enjoy, lest I unwittingly add to the evil of existence.

<sup>1</sup> *A Book without a Name*, published by Faber and Faber.

‘I would have all injustice appear to him as a temporal thing, though he live not to see it pass away. I deem no happiness possible to the human heart without this last distrust.

‘The preservation of my love for simple things, the protection of my mind against the doctrines that have been conceived by minds that never felt the heart of nature deepens. . . .’

The second book, *Narrow Waters*, was also of unusual interest, and it is strange that both the authors should be nameless.

During the summer months fruit of all kinds is abundant, most of which comes down from the plains of Afghanistan and Baluchistan. There are huge peaches, plump apricots, grapes, apples, and, for a short while, mangoes from the Indian plains. The English fruits grown abroad, however, definitely lack the flavour of those at home.

The mango is undoubtedly the most popular of the eastern fruits, but unfortunately its season is almost as short as the strawberry one at home. Many people, new to this fruit, have difficulty in eating it elegantly, and in case some readers are not acquainted with the composition of it I will give a few details. It is kidney-shaped and may be either large or small, but, speaking generally, the larger it is the more coarse. The skin is thin, and either green or yellow tinted with rose, and the stone is large, flat, and oval, and is embedded in a bright yellow, soft flesh. The taste of a really good yellow-skinned mango is delicately exquisite, but the cheaper and coarser kinds have more than a dash of turpentine in their make-up

When attempting to eat this fruit some slice it and

bring a teaspoon into play, but this is not satisfactory, because much of the flesh adheres to the stone and cannot be removed with a spoon. Others tear off the skin with their teeth, but these are the ill-bred. My method is not dignified, but I do make the most of what there is to be had. I cut the fruit through the flesh to the stone at the middle and the top half is wrenched off, leaving the stone protruding from the lower. The stoneless half is dealt with by a spoon. Discarded, the second half claims the attention where I shamelessly suck and scrape the stone with my front teeth. When cleaned I take it firmly between my front teeth and wrench it clear. By careful manipulation the stone is reversed and dealt with as before ; finally, discarded the now stoneless lower half is eaten, leaving only a mangoed mouth and fingers. I have yet to discover a more satisfying method of eating this fruit in polite society.

Another well-known fruit in Southern India is the Durien, which, however, is more notorious than popular, and resembles a large green melon with a crinkled skin. Inside is a pale yellow flesh in which are numerous seeds, and when first opened there is little smell and the taste is that of very sweet, weak coffee. Leave an opened Durien for any length of time, however, and you begin to wonder who has taken off the cover from the manhole leading into the local sewer. Those Europeans who eat this fruit do so with a spoon, but the natives have a more effective method of dealing with it. They hack it open and bury their faces in the flesh, eating their way through, but emerging every now and then to emit a mouthful of seeds.

I consider the famous Mangosteen an over-rated fruit because you spend five minutes opening it and half a minute eating it. It resembles a large tomato, but

with a very tough reddish-purple skin and the flesh is white and of delicate flavour, and surrounds four large seeds. Opening the fruit is a hazardous proceeding, because a sharp knife is needed which often slips off the leather-like skin to give you a nasty cut.

(III)

One of the more unusual and amusing of the many street scenes that I came across in Karachi was a thoroughly rebellious camel. They are extensively used for draught work in the city, each animal hauling a heavy, low, wooden cart. The harness, such as it is, is fixed to the hump, but there are no proper reins and the beast is stopped by pulling on the nose string which is fixed to a wooden peg in the nostril. If the driver wishes the camel to turn he hits it on the rump with a stick and the beast obeys. With slow, contemplative steps these camels proceed down the main roads hauling quite respectable loads. Their necks bob up and down and they view the world with their well-known supercilious gaze.

During the busiest time of the morning I was being driven in my car up one of the large main thoroughfares in the city, and towards us came a string of camel carts. The first cart turned down a side road and was followed by the second, but the camel of the third desired to proceed straight on. The driver, surprised and angry, pulled on the nose string and called his animal rude names, whilst my car was forced to pull up with screaming brakes, the camel having come out into the middle of the road.

"Misborn mountain, go where I bid," screamed the driver, whacking the beast with his stick.

The camel's answer to this was to throw up his head

and trot in a circle, occupying the whole road, and dragging the cart behind. Round and round he went, holding up all the traffic whilst quite a number of people became excited. Car drivers howled, and pedestrians shouted advice. Then the camel found that he was becoming giddy and so began to revolve in the opposite direction whilst a traffic policeman left his post and attempted to aid the driver. He stood in the path of the camel and waved his arms, but the immediate result of this was that the beast tried to step on him, and in his hasty retreat that policeman lost his pugaree, which was a fine one, and the camel trod on it. The policeman's language was even more lurid than that of the driver, who, by this time, had lost his head and could only scream abuse.

At last the rebellious animal decided to go home, and proceeded at a fast trot in the direction from which he had come. Quite thirty motor cars and other forms of transport had been held up for over ten minutes.

On another occasion I saw an unusually large he-goat standing between two sets of tram lines. Refusing to move he held up both lines and a tram driver was forced to descend and haul him off by his horns, much to the amusement of the onlookers on the crowded pavements, especially as the captive animal tried to butt.

Close to my hotel in cantonments was the road which led from the city, across the desert, to Hyderabad, Delhi, and the north. On it I saw many curious vehicles and not the least of them were the motor cars, and so old and decrepit were they that many of the bodies were held together with odd pieces of string and rope. Few had more than 5 per cent of the paint remaining, and each was tightly packed with human beings. I would never have believed it possible for so many people to have squeezed



themselves into a vehicle designed to hold, at the most, five. There were fathers, mothers, hordes of children, aunts, grandmothers, and servants, and tied to the running-boards were the household possessions, consisting of untidy bundles, beds, empty paraffin tins, and at least two fowls.

These cars proceeded at a spanking pace on well-worn tyres and undertook journeys I should think twice about making in a well-conditioned car. Out and across the desert they sped, where, or goodness knows how, or why, but they always appeared to reach their destinations.

(IV)

One of the more unpleasant things that have to be faced in India is the frightful suddenness of death and burial. You arise in the morning and sing gaily in your bath ; you meet with an accident, and by five o'clock in the evening you are six feet below the ground ; which when you consider it is almost indecent. In a week you are forgotten, unless your death was a particularly violent one, and then it is the violence which is recalled, rather than you yourself.

A small military funeral in India is not only grim, it is ghastly. During the morning urgent messages are sent out from headquarters stating that an officer has died and that the funeral will be at five o'clock that evening.

Because I hate it so much I always appear to be chosen to represent the formation to which I belong. I arise at 4 p.m. from my couch and prepare for the ordeal. I dress in tight-fitting khaki uniform and uncomfortable field-boots, and never on any occasion can the black band be found. Frantic and heat-producing searches

take place because my bearer cannot remember where it has been put.

At the appointed meeting-place there is a red-faced, perspiring Station Staff Officer who is in charge of the arrangements, which, if the officer is a senior one, can be complicated.

The cemetery in Karachi lies on the far side of cantonments, on the inner side of that barren waste which stretches for so many hundreds of miles to the north-east. The ground is yellow, and stony, and barren, and several times I stood in the hot sun by the gate and watched a procession wend its way from the distant hospital. Behind is a gaping hole and a mound of ravished, foreign, dusty soil.

The military band, perspiring freely, plays that soul-destroying march, and slowly the gun-carriage, covered with dusty, bedraggled wreaths approaches. It is so utterly depressing that one is led to wonder why we permit ourselves to be afflicted in this manner. When I die I will have no raving of the emotions if I am given the chance. Let me lie alone in peace for a few hours and then take me secretly away. Death should be dignified, and not sordid. Tears, crape, and the sacrifice of flowers affect the dear departed not at all. He can, or should be able, to read the real thoughts of those who mourn his passing. If I died to-morrow and was buried conventionally I should gather quite a lot of amusement from reading the thoughts of those who stood by my grave.

(v)

Command Headquarters in Karachi were situated five miles from cantonments in a curious block of buildings at Kiamari, overlooking the docks. Before the earth-

quake in 1935 these headquarters were in Quetta, but when forced to leave and come down to Karachi this was the only home that could be found for them.

A command, in peace-time, corresponds to a corps in war. In India it has a lieutenant-general, one or two major-generals, several brigadiers, full colonels, and many junior staff-officers, all of whom guide the destinies of divisions and brigades within the command boundaries.

I cannot resist quoting Mr. C. S. Jarvis, who wrote the following in his amusing book, *Three Deserts*. I agree heartily with what he says.

‘The British idea of a really efficient headquarters is a vast barrack filled with filing cupboards where junior clerks can store away as they arrive the stacks of returns that are received every mail, and if any information is required on any of the points covered by the return it can always be wired for. There is no case on record of anyone at any headquarters having gleaned information from a return, which perhaps is just as well. . . .’

When I consider the countless hours that clerks have spent, and are spending, in preparing returns for my signature, I am filled with despair. I have learned never to check a return; I sign it blindly and send it off. If someone should happen to read it and discover it to be false then I express regret and promptly twist the tail of the clerk who prepared it. I have known officers who carefully checked each return before they signed it. They are, in all cases, prematurely old men, with greyish hair, and worn expressions. When they should have been training their men in the art of war they, without exaggeration, sat at tables dealing with returns calling for detailed information on such subjects as :

The number of men in the unit who have corns ; who drink beer ; eat potatoes ; have illegitimate children ; and those who attend church on Sundays. Or it may be the numbers of animals in the lines which kick and bite, or lie down at night ; eat each other's tail, or have bad teeth. Again it may be the following upon which headquarters are panting for knowledge :

The number of mosquito nets in the unit which have holes in them ; the conditions of the knives flesh-cutting for the use of cooks ; or the number of rats last seen in the grain store.

Headquarters can become quite excited and shocked if you suggest your clerks are eternally filling up useless forms, and that they have other and more useful things to do.

My office in Command Headquarters was a mean little one, tucked away close to the hordes of offices connected with the Controller of Military Accounts. I have spoken of the *babu* earlier in this book and here you could see him in the mass ; there must have been hundreds of them and they chattered like apes.

In the beginning, with one or two exceptions, everyone treated me as something the dog had brought in and left about the office. I was a regimental officer and a poor fish, to be treated with condescension ; a nit-wit to whom you flung a good morning when you met it in the corridor. I had expected this, but what did infuriate me was the air of tolerance in the attitude ' Of course you will learn in time.'

For the first month things, from my point of view, did not go too badly in spite of the fact that every single thing I handled was Secret in a high degree. My chief was a clever, kindly man, who was helpful and understanding, but he was only holding his post temporarily

My work concerned policies and plans, and I was not very happy because I agreed with Kipling when he wrote :

‘ A Policy is the blackmail levied on the Fool by the Unforeseen.’

Policies need decisions, and it was rarely that I could get anyone to make one.

During my service I have had wide experience of the outlook of those who strive, by way of the staff, to crawl up the slippery steps towards the Altars of the Mighty. They follow such rules as these :

Never make a mistake, even a small one.

Never trust anyone.

Never accept responsibility unless forced to do so.

Never on any occasion give a direct answer to a question.

Never make an important decision if you can get someone above to do it for you, and take the blame if it turns out badly. His failure may be your gain. Delightful thought.

Never make up your mind on a difficult problem. Call a conference and let it do it for you.

Always remember that your dignity is in constant danger from attack by those junior to you, and that it must be maintained at all costs.

Never disagree with those in power above you. If you are right, and they wrong, they will turn and rend you.

Never sign an important paper without thinking how it might affect you.

Always go out of your way to be nice to, and cultivate the acquaintance of, those who may be of use.

If you always remember and do these things you may, in time, become a general.

The reader is quite right. I have broken all these

rules and I have also discovered that the Chairs of the Great are not as comfortable as they look.

(vi)

My bearer had brought in the afternoon tea, and clad in a light dressing-gown, I stood on the tiny balcony of my sitting-room and looked down on to the road where on the far side, was the small hotel garden and in it a glorious tree. Close upon thirty feet high its delicate green leaves resembled dyed ostrich plumes and close beside it was a vast bougainvillæa which was a tree and not a bush and cascaded magenta blossoms in the manner of a waterfall. In the dust of the roadside, and in the shade of the bougainvillæa, were a father and his two sons. A piece of aged cotton cloth had been spread out and the man was lying on his back upon it with a baby squirming at his side and the larger son clambering over his upraised knees.

The man sat up and I saw that he was an unusually large and brawny person, with an amiable, nut-brown face and a mop of greying hair. He picked up his fat semi-naked son and, holding him before his face, he fondled and kissed the baby. The scene forcibly reminded me of the Jat and the sick child in "Kim," except that this baby was glowing with health and my field-glasses showed that he had an impish face which creased into fat smiles. His tiny hands pulled his parent's broad nose and tugged at the bushy moustache.

This was undoubtedly an upcountry family, the Sindhis being a weak-kneed race. Probably the man was a farmer down in the city upon some land case in the courts and was now resting on his way to the station. Beside the elder boy was a small bundle from which

protruded a piece of firewood and a long roll of paper which might have been a blue print. I thought of the mother waiting in some village for the return of her family; or, perhaps, the man was a widower which would account for his having his family with him.

In due course, another and much older son appeared on the scene and he had evidently been shopping because he undid the bundle and placed his purchases in it. He then spread out what I suspected was a blue print and I saw it was an advertisement for Huntley and Palmer's biscuits. It was indeed a fine picture, with a royal coach in a coronation procession, and it was coloured with a blaze of red and gold, and had beautiful blue edges. Undoubtedly a treasure picked up in the city to be carefully carried home to decorate a living-room.

The father sat with crossed legs, like an image, and he fondled his baby with loving tenderness. This, I said to myself, was a piece of real India, almost untouched by our presence and administration and I called to my bearer who was flitting about in the bedroom.

"Look," I said. "Where does that man come from? He is an upcountry man, isn't he?"

My bearer looked down and then replied, scornfully.

"He is a sweeper, sahib."

"Nonsense. Sweepers don't look like that. Besides, what is he doing with that bundle?"

The bearer smiled.

"He is one of the hotel sweepers, sahib, and lives in the quarters behind your bedroom. His wife turns him out when she wishes to clean their room, so he sits there and looks after the children."

Annoyed at making a fool of myself to myself I went to my desk and tea, where I sat down and wrote the

next section of this chapter. When I have to write what are, to me, unpleasant facts I can only do so when I am irritated.

## (vii)

In concluding this book, I, a common, unidealistic man, give my views on the situation in India to-day. I shall, of course, be accused of talking through my hat concerning matters of which I have little knowledge. I have wavered for some little time, because it is true that nothing I could say would change anything, and muck heaps are best allowed to cover themselves with a film of weeds or grass.

Before beginning, I wish to say that I think India is one of the most wonderful countries in the world and I am very fond of the Indian. In his natural, unwesternised state he has much charm. We, however, have tried to force him to behave and think as we do and this colossal self-conceit on our part will one day cause rivers of blood to flow again in that country.

India, where the European is concerned is, and always has been, second-rate. The administration has more silly old, much-decorated men sitting in high places than there has any right to be, and, as Kipling says: 'The incompetent hangs on longer in India than anywhere else.'

Compared to other portions of the Empire the amusements, food, dress, houses, furniture, shops, transport, servants, art, and culture, are all in the nature of makeshifts. I challenge anyone to deny that this, at least, is a fact. There is more class snobbery than there is on Fifth Avenue in New York, and stupid, uneducated, third-rate people with large monthly incomes set themselves up as little tinselled gods, only to revert to what



they really are when they are sent home to die in the obscurity of some provincial town.

It sickened me to stand by and watch how we fawn upon the new provincial Indian legislators. Even the Viceroy recently admitted that the B.B.C. had embarrassed him regarding the despatch of certain troops to China.

Government House is no longer the social focal point, because a Governor, carrying out his instructions, is far too busy entertaining the now important legislator.

I was talking on this subject in a club with a senior officer and he at once complained bitterly about the manner in which he himself had been treated.

"Here am I, a senior officer on the staff. Been here four months and they have completely ignored me. In the old days I would have written home," he said furiously.

"You wrote your name in the book, I suppose?" I said, in reply.

"Of course I did. The first week I came here. God knows I don't want to go to Government House, but what does infuriate me is the principle that a fellow in my position should be pushed aside to make way for middle-class Indians and their fat wives whom no ruling prince, or nobleman, would allow beyond his courtyard."

"Yes, I do agree with you," I said. "But if that happens to you, what about the juniors?"

"My dear fellow, they consider themselves lucky if the Governor nods when they lift their hats to him as the car passes them in the street."

I grinned and then changed the topic of conversation.

What is to be the end? We are gradually handing

over India, and will that loyal, delightful, and simple person, the Indian peasant, realize that he has been fooled, and rise up? Or will he be resigned to his fate; a fate which all those who like him can easily imagine.

The following lines, written many years ago by Kipling, are true of the educated, low-class Indian to-day. By educated I mean on western lines.

‘But a Servant when he Reigneth  
Is Confusion to the end.  
His feet are swift to tumult,  
His hands are slow to toil,  
His ears are deaf to reason,  
His lips are loud in broil.  
He knows no use for power  
Except to show his might.  
He gives no heed to judgement  
Unless it prove him right.’

The following is an extract from a leading article taken from a daily Karachi newspaper :

‘There are two highly prevalent forms of corruption in (Indian) official circles in India. One is the form in which a willing or complaisant public pay consideration (money) to officials to favour them in the disposal of their business. The other form is that in which educated and unscrupulous officials *rob illiterates and the ignorant who come to them in the course of their official work by overcharging fees or making illegal exactions.* . . .

‘Taking an all-inclusive view of corruption the high official who accepts free conveyance from persons interested in gaining his favour is equally corrupt as the pattawalla who demands two annas before he will announce a visitor’s arrival to a high official. . . .

‘The callous robbing of poor ignorant litigants and

of others seeking the services from officials to which they are by right entitled, should be put down with a strong hand.'

Who, you may ask yourself, is going to put a stop to this now that Indians are beginning to govern themselves?

Self-government in India can be compared to attempting to rule England in the Middle Ages with a Catholic king and court and a Puritan parliament. Hindus are the Catholics and the Mohammedans the Puritans, and the two will never rule together in peace. This is a fact that cannot be hidden by the most high-flown phrases or ideals.

It is true that we are only gradually handing over the reins, but how long will the individual Briton endure the petty insolence and gross indignities to which, even now, he is being subjected? This is a nice point, and it would be interesting to watch the faces of the idealists at home if they could listen to bar-side conversations in the clubs in India. A young policeman, for example, from Central India told me of personal experiences which made my blood boil. I asked him how he was going to endure such things. He shrugged his shoulders and said he had to live, but had he known just a little of what he would have to face, nothing would have brought him to this country.

In conclusion I will quote a conversation held with two Indian foremen on the railway when I was travelling second-class just before leaving India.

The elder of the two men was past middle-age and toothless, but he carried his set of false teeth in the upper portion of the betel-nut can on the floor at his feet. Our conversation began with my offering him a cigarette,

but he refused it saying that he only indulged in betel-nut. He offered some of it to me, and on my saying that I had never tried it, pressed me to do so. With natural hesitation I accepted and he at once set about preparing the strange concoction. First of all came the dark green leaf shaped like that from a lime tree ; this was coated with a thin layer of lime paste (slaked, of course) over which was spread another paste, dark red in colour. Upon this was sprinkled a few grains of broken betel-nut, the leaf was expertly folded and handed to me.

Wondering if I should be sick I placed the mess in my mouth and started to chew it ; the taste was so strong as to make me cough, and it closely resembled that of aniseed. As soon as politeness allowed I spat out the chewed mass through the window where it left a nasty red stain on the door of the carriage. Both Indians had watched my face with rapt attention whilst I had been chewing and they enquired what I thought of the taste. Lying, I said it was enchanting but strong, and was then informed that it was an excellent antiseptic for the mouth and stomach, a fact I can well believe.

From this we frankly discussed the purdah system, coming at last to what they thought of the new form of government. The elder man now became quite excited and his theme was a common one :

“ Why can't they leave us alone ? Your rule, although by no means perfect, has brought wealth, prosperity, and peace to us, who, before you came, knew nothing but wars, looting, and oppression. We of the land,” he continued, almost violently, “ do not want to rule ourselves. I have much land in the Punjab and so I know. The *babus* (he called them grey apes who chattered senselessly) come to my village and persuade my sons to go into the city. Two have gone already and only the

third is left, and he, the good-for-nothing (said affectionately), wishes to go also, but I will not permit it, for who is to care for the land now that I am old? Already much is wasted and I am robbed by hired servants. I think your people have become mad, as do the very aged."

"Listen, sahib," he said, quickly, as the train slowed down at a station. "Those paunchy *babus* of the cities want only to rule because they know that then they can rob us who are of the land and simple lovers of peace. We have pride of race; they, jackals that they are, would drink our tears and eat our heritage."

The second Indian, who was much younger, nodded his complete agreement.

